

**FIRST LADIES AS INSTANTANEOUS PHILANTHROPISTS: HOW PUBLIC OFFICE HOLDERS' WIVES  
(UN)DO PHILANTHROPISM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

As one of the popular practices dating back to the days of military rule in pre-1999 Nigeria, the existence of the Office of First Ladies occupied by wives of Presidents and State Governors for philanthropic activities commonly referred to as “State Pet Projects” has continued in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, at both the State and Federal levels with the primary objective of fostering sustainable development. While in office, most public office holders and their first ladies organize several fund raising ceremonies where many contractors and favor-seekers donate in cash and in kind to the projects. However, these “Pet Projects” are rarely sustained beyond the tenure of their husbands. Another key issue of concern is the question of transparency and accountability in fundraising and management as well as execution of the projects. Using theoretical discourse, public perception, and instances from selected cases of serving and former First Ladies pet projects, the paper examines how huge sums of money are generated for philanthropic purposes and the outcome on the lives of ordinary Nigerians. The article also examines the implications of such practices for the theory and practice of philanthropy and sustainable development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Philanthropy, sustainable development, pet project, first lady, public office

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of philanthropy is fast becoming a cornerstone in Nigeria's political and social landscape, most especially as the issue of sustainable development has taken centre stage in the country. Politicking in the country is greatly weaved on the basis of the level of philanthropic activities of power seekers, to the extent that political gladiators are being assessed not by their qualifications and capabilities but on the basis of how they assist in providing social support services to the people. This is leading to the popularization of the saying that '*who you help*' in the political environment especially when a person is throwing his hat in the political ring. Perhaps, the high incidences of poverty and unemployment are contributing to why most Nigerians are shifting their attentions toward the political class for succor. In response, the political class sees philanthropic activities as the surest way to gain popular support for their political aspirations. In view of this, it becomes difficult to determine whether the philanthropic activities of the political class are for the benefits of the needy (towards fostering sustainable development) or to propagate their own political agenda.

In another dimension, the religious doctrine is also fuelling the concept in Nigeria's political space. The two holy books (Bible and Qur'an) dedicate several sections to enjoin philanthropic acts by the affluent to the needy. This coincided with the socialistic tendencies and communal living style of the country where it is culturally the responsibility of the haves to extend hands of fellowship to the have-not for their social and economic development; a failure of which turn the wealthy to be tagged as stingy and self-centered. This had over the years made the concept of philanthropy central to the religious and social relationship among the people

However, the problematic is that in spite of the centrality of this concept to political and social discourse, it is not receiving expected scholarship attention as one of the major factors that is shaping politics, governance and social interactions in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this paper attempts to contribute to the academic discourse on the subject with interest in how 'first ladies' do and undo *philanthropism* for sustainable development in Nigeria under the aegis of 'State Pet Projects'. The objectives are to establish the linkage between *philanthropism* and politics, highlights the forms which the philanthropic activities take and the argument surrounding the motive of the first ladies' philanthropic activities, whether for profit or assistance to humanity. The paper attempts to discuss why most of the pet projects are rarely sustained beyond the tenure of the husbands of the first ladies. In doing this, the paper is organized into six sections, the first being the introduction. The second section examines the concept of philanthropy in the Nigerian context as adopted by the political elite. The third section discusses the conceptual review and theoretical discourse of philanthropy with focus on scholarships definitions, contestations and convergence, in the context of how Nigerian first ladies do and undo philanthropy for sustainable development. Section four of the paper highlighted some of the first ladies' philanthropic activities, tracing its historical development and contributing to the argument on its legality or otherwise. The fifth section streamlines the discourse to focus on the activities of Wellbeing Foundation and Community Link Advancement Program as case studies. The paper ends with the submission of the authors on the subject matter.

## CONCEPT OF PHILANTHROPY AND ITS CONTEXT IN NIGERIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL SPACE

Nigeria is a diverse country made up of about 250 ethnic groups with more than 500 languages and a number of religious beliefs. Despite these diversities, one common factor that seems to unify almost all these groups is the cultural and political philanthropic belief. It is widely believe that God deliberately created economic imbalance among the people in order to encourage philanthropic acts. For instance, it is stated in Chapter 6 verse 165 of the Holy Qur'an that:

....and He has raised you in ranks, some above others that He may try you in that which He has bestowed on you. Surely, your Lord is swift in awarding punishment (to those who deserve it), but He is indeed Most Forgiving, Ever-Merciful (towards the aspirants to forgiveness)

Premised on this, there is a popular notion that God concentrates the wealth of many people in the family (and community at large) in the hands of few individuals who are expected to redistribute such wealth to the 'rightful owners' in the forms of philanthropic acts. Any attempt or refusal of the rich to constantly and continuously give out to the poor is religiously seen as a mighty sin against humanity and God. This to the extent that a whole chapter of the Holy Qur'an is dedicated to this (see Chapter 102) especially verse 1-2 that states that: '*Woe to him) who accumulates wealth and keeps counting it!*' The Holy Bible also attested to this in 1 Timothy 5:8 that

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

This popular notion and the religious doctrine made the poor to see the freebies from the rich members of their families and communities as a right and not privilege. Perhaps, this led to the popular Yoruba saying that: '*ise lo se dase, owo o se dana*' (meaning: one can only work to make money alone but cannot spend such money alone). Recognizing this notion, Schervish (1998) argued that philanthropy is guided by moral entreaty and social obligations that must be positively responded to even against the good will, intent and volition of the donor. In view of this, philanthropy is an act that is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural space in Nigeria. Payton (1987) attested to this notion when he affirms that cultural influence is an important factor is the psychological debate of the concept of philanthropy.

The socio-cultural notion of *philanthropism* is already extended to the political space. In fact, a member of the family or community occupying a public office (either political or bureaucratic) is believed to be holding forth for the members of his family and community at large, hence must give returns in cash and kind. This trajectory takes a disturbing dimension as community members and religious leaders often encourage the politicians to amass wealth by cutting bigger share of the 'national cake' (public fund) even if it means engaging in corrupt practices as long as such politicians give back to their communities. On one hand, a deviant who decide to act incorruptible is tag a 'bastard' wasting the opportunity of his people. On the other hand, a corrupt public office holder who gives back to the community is celebrated with chieftaincy titles even if such person is facing corruption related trial in the court of law. Amazingly, drums are rolled anytime such person is coming home.

One of the criteria to measure prospective public office holder in most Nigerian communities is the extent of possible philanthropic acts that such vote-seeker will roll out if voted into power. Thus, a better way to demonstrate this is for the vote-seeker to show his intent to seek public office through engagement in philanthropic activities in forms of empowerment programs, social support for community members and non-state provisions of basic public goods such as portable water, drainage and road construction and donating electricity transformers and poles among others. Such a person is bound to be seen as a savior who will do more if voted into power. Hence, politicians in Nigeria have come to realize the mighty power of philanthropy in influencing political behavior and decision making of the people. As pointed out by a former federal legislator in Nigeria, Honourable Moruf Akinderu-Fatai (2016) contends that

...our people have misconstrued the functions of the legislators to include provision of social services and infrastructural facilities which are hitherto the constitutional responsibilities of the executive. This over the years prompted the legislators to engage in constituency projects to satisfy the yearnings of the people. As a legislator, if you wish to gain popular support of the people and secure your re-election bid for sophomore terms in the National Assembly, roll out more of philanthropic activities.

Political office holders are now known for their philanthropic activities especially the first ladies under the auspices of their state pet projects. While the husbands are prospecting for public offices, the wives strategize on the appropriate pet projects to roll out once their husbands eventually grab the anticipated offices. In Nigeria today, pet projects is no longer limited to first ladies, wives of other political office holders such as legislators, ministers, commissioners, and special advisers among others do engage in philanthropic ventures to boost the political empires of their husband as well as for their own socio-political and economic gains. In fact, they now form associations where at the federal level, the wife of the President sits as Chairperson with wives of the Governors as members. At the state level, the wives of the Governors are Chairperson in their own rights with wives of the commissioners, special advisers and other political appointees as members. This also trickles down to the local government level. Outside the political space, Aganbi (2016) assert that Nigerian celebrities also engage in philanthropic activities through pet projects that range from girl child rights and children education to medical cares. Perhaps, the intent behind the charitable acts is to give back to the society that produce them and also for political and social gain in line with the popular saying that 'one is expected to put his money where his mouth is' (Aganbi, 2016).

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW AND THEORETICAL DISCOURSE OF PHILANTHROPY IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Payton (1987) argued that the concept of philanthropy is shrouded in academic contestations where scholars attempt to give it different definitions with each based on human diversities. Etymologically, Sulek (2010) traced its first usage to Sir Francis Bacon's 1612 published essay titled 'On Goodness and Goodness of Nature', where he (Bacon) used it to described the 'goodness and affecting the weal of men' via the habit of doing good. However, Payton (1987) traced its contestability in academic discourse to W. B. Gallie around 1957. To him (Payton), the contestability of the concept led to the emergence of two different fundamental forms which he identifies as: philanthropy as ideology and/or philanthropy as human nature.

On one hand, viewing philanthropy as an ideology further deepened the conceptual contestability especially between the psychologists and scientists. The psychologists argued that one will not understand the concept of philanthropy if cultural influence is eliminated as a factor. However, the scientists see philanthropy as an ideology that developed in man through his intelligence to achieve his desires (Payton, 1987). Though, Payton tilted towards the argument of the psychologists when he asserted that one of the reasons for failure of philanthropy is the encroachment of cultural bias in scholarship analysis of the concept. The point of convergence among these two thoughts is the fact that they see philanthropy as an ideology but the point of divergence is the *a priori* epistemological standpoint brought about by the argument in favor or against the place of cultural value in the development of *philanthropism*.

On the other hand, Payton (1987) attributed philanthropy to human nature as their instinct to engage in philanthropic acts is based on spiritual forces in relations to the bond between family members especially that of parent and child or among siblings. To Payton, the combinations of cultural and human nature are important determinants to study philanthropy which he described as political-economic philosophy which is based on five generalizations:

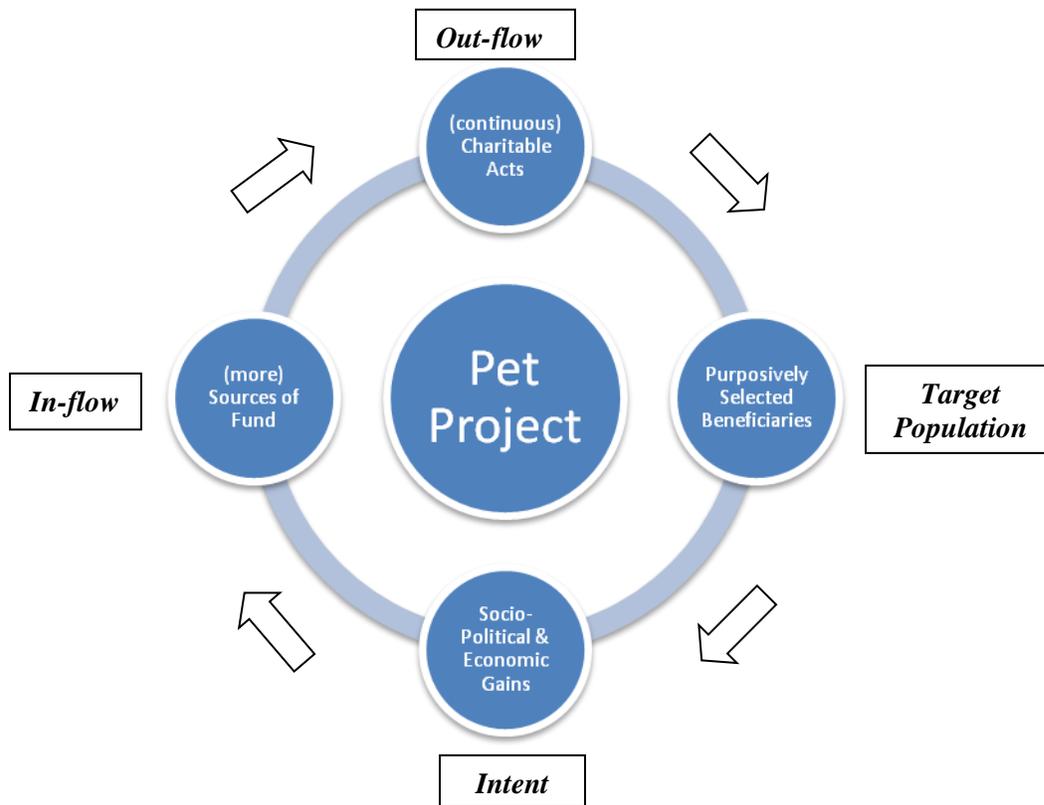
- i. Human nature allows for rational non-economic behavior toward public good
- ii. Human condition accepts human frailty on some people and goodness from others which eventually shape the social interaction and environment
- iii. The concept of individualism allows for pro-social and anti-social behavior which aid participation and isolation in communal relationship (*philanthropism*)
- iv. A political-economic system that recognized the idea of liberty i.e. right to dispose one's property for reasons other than private and exclusive benefit.
- v. A political-economic system that allows individual of freedom to participate in social and economic activities.

In a similar vein, Sealander (2003) also identifies two classifications of theoretical intents of *philanthropism* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the 'Christian charity' and 'scientific philanthropy'. To Sealander, the former refers to the philanthropic activities that seeks to improve the living conditions of the poor by alleviating their suffering as enjoined in the Biblical teachings and scripture (such as: Luke 3: 11; Acts 10: 2; 1 Timothy 5: 8; and which are also shared in the Islamic doctrines as provided for in Qur'an 19:55; 6: 165; and 2: 219 among others). On the contrary, the scientific philanthropy seeks to address the causes of social and economic imbalance as depicted in poverty rate with the intent of initiating permanent solution. Carnegie (1993) argued in favor of scientific philanthropy on the ground that it encourages self reliance and economic productivity. He (Carnegie) argued against Christian charity type of philanthropy because of its potency to encourage perpetual poverty which he referred to as 'pauperism'.

The foregoing analysis depict that philanthropy is anchored on the 'intent' of the actors and the consequent 'outcome' on the beneficiaries. This is best captured by Van Til's definition of philanthropy as

the voluntary giving and receiving of time and money aimed (however imperfectly) towards the needs of charity and the interests of all in a better quality of life (Van Til, 1990, p. 34)

The ‘intent-outcome’ of *philanthrpsism* eventually brought the argument of Van Til against Carnegie’s. While Van Til’s argument is anchored on the intent of ‘a better quality of life for all’ even if such did not materialized or the donor has other secondary intentions, Carnegie opined that what is most important is whether the philanthropic acts actually alleviate poverty among the beneficiaries. In the Nigerian case, especially with regard to how first ladies do and undo *philanthropism*, one may see a peculiar trajectory of mixed intent and outcome. In a simple term, one may be disturbed on why the poverty rate in Nigeria keeps soaring despite the huge philanthropic activities of the first ladies which are mostly with the intent of moving people of out poverty level. One may attribute this to the Van Til’s model that philanthropy is most about intent and not outcome. However, the concern here is the notion that most (if not all) first ladies seem not to have public interest as their intents, rather their own personal socio-political and economic interests; going by the way the philanthropic acts are conceived, implemented and evaluated (this will be expatiated later in the paper). While this in real time negates Van Til’s argument, it neither achieves Carnegie’s ideology of achieving poverty alleviation outcome. To this end, the Nigerian experience of the ‘intent-outcome’ trajectory of philanthropy is illustrated in figure 1



**Figure 1: ‘Intent-Outcome’ Analysis of First Ladies’ Philanthropic Model in Nigeria**  
 Source: Authors’ conception

The figure 1 depicts the relationship cycle of first ladies' pet projects in Nigeria in the wake of Van Til-Carnegie's intent-outcome argument. The volume of philanthropic activities of the first lady's pet project (central idea) is significantly influenced by the rate of inflow (i.e. funding). The higher the financial and material support for the pet project, the higher the volume of charitable acts (out-flow) and this will have corresponding increase in the number of beneficiaries (who are mostly from a targeted population: political party members, supporters of the first lady, residents of immediate society, family members, associates etc). The outcome is the intent of the first lady whether economic, social or political. As this activities progress, the likelihood that the volume of fund will increase and the cycle continues. Two implications are identifiable: one, as soon as there is break or disconnect in the source of funding, the cycle breaks bringing the pet project to an end; two, the pet project rarely consider the Carnegie-projected outcome (whether the pet project is actually impacting positively on the lives of the beneficiaries). This is mainly because, there is no window for evaluation and auditing in the cycle and this seems deliberate on the part of the first ladies since they are not accountable to anybody or public institution in terms of oversight or program audit.

Premised on this theoretical background, it is noted that conceptualizing philanthropy has generated contentions among scholars especially on the ground of semantic orientation. This has over the years (from classical to contemporary epochs) led to the proliferations of definitions of the concept. In this paper, we will discuss few ones that are related to our core thesis. According to an online dictionary, philanthropy is defined as the 'desire to benefit humanity: a desire to improve the material, social, and spiritual welfare of humanity, especially through charitable activities' (Encarta Dictionary, 2009). By this definition, philanthropy can best be understood in its simplistic form to mean act of giving out by the haves to the have-nots, any material or service that is generally aimed at positively transforming the lives of the latter. This is not limited to materialistic resources but also include cultural and social support services that may uplift the recipients even religiously.

The religious aspect of *philanthropism* is what Payton (1987) describes as the cultural influence to the understanding of philanthropy under the debate of the psychologists. This notion gained more momentum especially in Africa where religion and cultural considerations often dictate societal norms and social interactions; a form of *philanthropism* that is regard as 'Christian charity' (Sealander, 2003). Though, other factors have been identified as determinants of *philanthropism*. These according to Muhammad (2016) include: attitude, perceived behavioural control, and most significantly subjective norm.

In recent times, Salamon (1992) defined philanthropy as 'the private giving of time or valuables for public purposes'. Though Sulek (2009) identified this definition as the most widely accepted one in the field of philanthropy, the aspect of Salamon's definition that best describe the thesis of the paper is his basic characteristic of philanthropy when he asserts that it is 'one form of income of private non-profit organizations' (Salamon, 1992, p. 10). Sulek (2009) in his own view sees it as the 'application of private means to public ends'. However, the fundamental issue to thinker upon is the actual intents of the philanthropists, whether for public good in the real sense or private good in the long run. Payton (1987) had earlier stimulated this concern when he claimed that philanthropic activities by non-for-profit organizations (otherwise called corporate philanthropy) is a powerful means of appealing to people thus serve as an alternative to government (p. 4).

From all the definitions, one common end is the attempt to achieve social equilibrium where everybody regardless of his status will be able to meet the minimum social needs in terms of material things and spiritual factors. Its essence is for the love of all humanity through extending the hands of benevolence toward the whole of humankind. The essence of philanthropy is for those who have in excess to give out to those who are needful but could not afford to satisfy their needs. The spiritual explanation of philanthropy is captured in the two Holy books. The Qur'an states that

.....and they also ask you about what they should spend. Say: '(spend) whatever is in surplus to your needs.', thus does Allah make His commandments clear to you so that you may meditate (Qur'an Chapter 2: 219)

The Bible also states that

John answered, 'The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same' (Luke 3: 11)

From the foregoing, one can see the significant influence of cultural factor (moral entreaty and religious obligations) as a major determinant of the dimension of philanthropy. Though, the dust raised by the arguments of scholars is yet to settle on the subject matter, there seems to be convergence of opinions that philanthropy is a means to satisfy the unfulfilled needs of the less-privileged through the generous act of the privileged. However, there is divergence of opinions as to the intent and outcome of the act. This, Sulek (2009) identified under three headlines

- i. Whether it is a voluntary act or compelled by moral and social obligations
- ii. Whether it serves public good or the desire of the donor; and
- iii. Whether it is aimed at achieving a particular aim or it is simply an act of giving underpinned by private motive (p. 203).

### **FIRST LADIES' PHILANTHROPIC ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA: LEGALIZING ILLEGALITY?**

The emergence of first ladyship in the history of Nigerian government and politics is traceable to the military era of General Ibrahim Babangida when his wife Maryam Babangida floated her pet project christened 'Better Life for Rural Women' and created the office of the first lady. Before this period, the wives of the previous rulers in the country were neither seen nor heard in the political space except on few occasions when they attended public events with their husbands. Maryam Babangida changed the tide by not only creating the office of the first lady but also created offices for the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA), Police Officers' Wives Association (POWA), schools, women training centres, hospitals, and children's day care centres among others with funding from the government despite their non-recognition by the country's extant laws (Uba and Halim, 2010).

It should be noted that the act is not alien in politics as the concept has been entertained in the United States politics and governance where first ladies engage in political decision making, serving as advisors to their husbands (Gilmore, 2012)

despite the fact that the office is not legally recognized. The act was initiated by Dolley Madison who engaged in many philanthropic activities including the Washington City Orphan Asylum founded in 1815 to assist indigent children, orphans and the youths in United States (Gilmore, 2012). During her time, Dolly Madison acted as wife of the President but the epithet of ‘first lady’ was ascribed to her during her funeral by President Zachary Taylor in 1849. Since then, successive wives of the Presidents of the United States have continued the tradition with peculiar pet projects (Kelly, 2017). Perhaps, Maryam Babangida received inspiration from the United States’ stereotype by using the office to give relevance to herself and the women folks (Uba and Halim, 2010), especially the wives of public officers in Nigeria. Between 1985 and 1993, during the reign of her husband, Maryam Babangida raised the bar and set high standard for succeeding first ladies.

The ascension of General Sani Abacha ushered Maryam Abacha to the office of the first lady. However, she set a new record by discontinuing the many pet projects of the former first lady; rather she initiated her own pet project known as ‘family support program’ among many others. One of her landmark achievements is the establishment of National Hospital for women and children which the federal government later upgraded and renamed as ‘National Hospital, Abuja’ (Uba and Halim, 2010). The sudden death of her husband as expected collapsed the pet project and the country witnessed a less active successor, in the person of Honourable Justice Fati Lami Abubakar in 1998. The invisibility of the office of the first lady during the reign of General Abdulsalam Abubakar could be attributed to two factors. The first was the fact that the tenure was short (barely a year) and the second was unconnected with her status as a Justice of Nigeria’s Supreme Court who perhaps knew the unconstitutionality of the office and would not want to engage in legal impunity (Odinukwe, 2015). Though she also floated her pet project ‘Women Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)’ but the project operated with less publicity.

The second coming of General Olusegun Obasanjo as civilian President in 1999 saw the emergence of Child Care Trust by the new first lady, Stella Obasanjo. Unlike her predecessors, she wielded enormous political power which was attributed to her political activism coupled with her elite family background. She was known for championing the cause of underprivileged children and women as well as being a frontrunner in the fight against women trafficking which won her funding from international agencies.

The emergence of President Umar Yar’Adua in 2007 signaled a new dawn in first ladyship pet project in Nigeria as Turai Yar’Adua floated her pet project ‘International Cancer Centre’ (ICC) which was funded through Public Private Partnership (Uba and Halim, 2010). She also expanded the horizon of the office by relating directly with the first ladies of the thirty six states (wives of the Governors). The success of her pet project may not be unconnected with the fact that she had held the first ladyship for eight years while her husband held sway as the Governor of Katsina state between 1999 and 2007. She introduced another dimension to first ladyship activities by not relying on government funding but uses her influence to organize fund raising ceremony for her pet project. The ceremony was honored by state Governors, political heavy weights, government contractors, and high ranking diplomats among other high profile dignitaries. The guests publicly donated money and material resources and about N10 billion was raised (Aliu, 2011). The intrigues and intricacies that surrounded the power tussle during the illness and eventual death of her husband collapsed the pet project and the country saw the establishment of

a new one called Women for Change Initiative (WCI) by her successor, Dame Patience Jonathan. The WCI was more of women empowerment in terms of political appointment than social services.

With the emergence of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015, one would have expected that the office of the first lady will operate with less 'noise' given his high disdain for impunity, illegality and corruption. This view was also shared by Odinukwe (2015) in her assertion that with the emergence of Aisha Buhari as the first lady '...whether the office of the first lady magically survive again or not, Nigerian women look forward to new lessons from Mrs. Aisha Buhari'. The notion almost got a support of the President when on assumption of office, he ordered his wife, Aisha Buhari to close down her multi-million naira beauty parlor in Kaduna to avoid political patronage. However, this was proved wrong as the first lady also floated her pet project 'Future Assured' with beauty and glamour.

The trajectory at the federal level is replicated at the state government level. All wives of the Governors floated pet projects with the previous collapsing once the tenures of their husband end and the emergence of new Governors see the emergence of new pet projects. One common variable in all the pet projects is that they are all geared toward philanthropic agenda with major focus on women and children. Perhaps, this was why Thomas (2016) argued that 'these pet projects have spanned over decade and keep changing names, color and wrapping sheet though the same package'.

There is no argument as to the constitutionality of the office of the first lady but what is raising dust is the legality or otherwise of their activities especially the aspect of raising fund for their philanthropic activities. On one hand, while it is arguable that the pet projects and their *philanthropism* seem to have been personalized, Chris Uche, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria opined that first ladyship is not constitutionally and legally wrong provided the accompanying pet projects are aimed at stimulating development through provision of services which government failed to provide (Sunday Trust, July 26, 2009).

On the other hand, first ladyship is regarded as act of impunity as a result of its unconstitutionality and the illegal means of raising fund for its acclaimed philanthropic activities. It is widely believe that most of the pet projects are directly funded through governments' extra budgetary spending. This in most case is denied. Government officials are quick to deny funding the pet projects of the first ladies; however, investigations showed that the projects are financed from public purse without legislative appropriation. Nwogu et.al (2016) contend that many of the pet projects collapse immediately the tenure of the first ladies' husbands ended because of the stoppage in government funding.

According to Lanre Sodeinde (during interview with Niyi Aliu, 2011)

They (first ladies) were not doing what they were doing because of any genuine love for the people.....if you take time to study their operation, the pet projects are actually designed to improve the lot of the first ladies rather than the advertised targets....[they] invite government contractors to fund-raising ceremony,.... if the woman generates N100 million through the fund-raising and only disburses N10 million, who is going to call her to account [for the remaining money]...I think it is a window for the wives of public officers to rake money for themselves.

This view was earlier observed by Payton (1987) when he asserts that the concept of philanthropy has different dimensions which make many people to become dissatisfied with it. In his words

Many people are dissatisfied with the notion of 'philanthropy'...(because of) the beneficial effects of self-interest in the marketplace have been considered different from (the real intent of) philanthropy... In one context, the essential value is the voluntary dimension; in another context, it is the private character of the source; in still a third context it is the requirement of serving the public good (Payton, 1987, p. 3).

To buttress the argument of Sodeinde and the assertion of Payton, one fundamental question is to ask about the whereabouts of the N10 billion raised by Turai Yar'Adua for her pet project 'International Cancer Centre' (ICC) which has since discontinued. While this has become a question on lips of many with no answer, the trajectory seems to continue unabated even under the President Muhammadu Buhari who is adjudged incorruptible. His wife, Aisha Buhari is seen to have introduced a new dimension to the so called 'illegal fund raising' when China gave her N60 million through the Chinese Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Lin Jin, on the pretence of Sino-Nigeria bilateral relationship (Vanguard, June 12, 2017). Earlier in 2016, she had launched her book 'The Essentials of Beauty Therapy: A Complete Guide for Beauty Therapy' in an event that was well attended by prominent politicians and government contractors, among others who launched the book with undisclosed amounts (Alagbe, 2016). Though, she claimed that proceeds of the book launch will go to the parents of the abducted Chibok girls but since then, one is still awaiting the news of such donation.

The illegality is also heightened and technically legalized as an office has since been created in the Presidential Villa for the 'Office of the First Lady of Nigeria despite its non-provision for such in the country's constitution. Though, Aisha Buhari refused to be called 'first lady' but she is said to be operating from this same office where her predecessors used in the Villa (Alagbe, 2016). Aside fund raising, an instance of state government illegally funding the office of the first lady was reported in 2017 that the Muritala Nyako-led Adamawa State government released N41.5 million for the offices of his four first ladies (Weekly Trust, September 22, 2017).

Another instance of extreme case of illegal fund raising worthy of note is that of the first lady of the Benue State Governor, Yemisi Suswam, who was reported to receive N70 million in cash and several million of donations by government contractors, bank officials and political executives. For instance, Cecilia Ibru of Oceanic Bank donated N15 million, Aliko Dangote donated N10 million, and Hajiag Construction Nigeria Limited (a company handling major road constructions in the state) donated N10 million among several others (Sunday Trust, July 26, 2009). All these are clear violation of the nation's code of conduct but which are somewhat legalize by virtue of privileges attached to the offices of their husband, therefore, using state apparatus to legalize illegalities.

## **PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF FIRST LADIES' PET PROJECTS FOR THE PRACTICE OF PHILANTHROPY IN NIGERIA**

Without perversion, the primary objective of any philanthropic act is to impact positively on the lives of the beneficiaries or better still as Van Til (1990) put it to be 'for the public good'. The first ladies have on several occasions and media boasted to having impacted positively on the lives of Nigerians, rolling out drums to celebrate their achievements, projecting several beneficiaries displaying or reporting what they gained from the philanthropic activities of these first ladies. For instance, according to the report of the Wellbeing Foundation (WBF) of the former first lady of the Kwara State, Oluwatoyin Saraki, (whose husband is the current Nigeria's Senate President), hundreds of thousand Nigerians have benefitted from her philanthropic activities since 2003 to date. These range from health, human rights, social welfare, child right advocacy, education, arts and culture to citizens and democracy advocacy among others. Precisely, about 2,000 people have benefited from health fund while more than 30 orphans are on *Alaafia Kwara* scholarship, and 56 motherless babies are also receiving support from the pet project (WBF, 2018; and Shittu, 2018).

For these achievements not to be seen as self-praise and aggrandizement, an online opinion poll was conducted on the social media on public perception about the impact of the pet projects of the first ladies on the people and its implication for the practice of philanthropy in Nigeria. Out of the several comments, few thought provoking ones are filtered and used for analysis. For instance, Olatunji sees it as 'a nice way to rake millions and travel around the world while claiming to be empowering women and building the nation'. In a similar manner, another respondent (name withheld) claimed it is 'a cunning way of extorting money from the nation by the first ladies and their associates'. In his word, a respondent state that

To think that the budget does not make provisions for this project (pet projects) gives a lot of concern. In the end, it is money earmarked for other sectors that is diverted to the so called projects

Another response worthy to note is the one that state that

...it is high time a provision is enshrined in the constitution banning anything called office of the first lady, it is almost becoming a major distraction for the government

As the projects received knocks, there is appreciable number of positive comments commending the philanthropic activities of the first ladies. For instance, a respondent by the name, Dele, asserts that

WOTCLEF was the first pet project by a vice president's wife and I must admit it had very strong positive effect. It is still in place and many people even thought it was a government agency because of the way it was efficiently run all of the pet projects, I doff my hat for WOTCLEF

A respondent claims that

Correct me if I am wrong, I think these pet projects started with Mariam (Babangida). Incidentally, it is the most successful and life impacting

On the pet project of the wife of General Sani Abacha, a respondent wrote

I still remember the Family Support Programme of Maryam Abacha. In Owerri, the FSP nurse and primary school is still waxing strong. It's one of the cheapest and most populated schools in Imo State.

Aside the knocks and kudos, some respondents make some comments on how the pet projects could be improved upon. Oladayo wrote two posers

Must they always start a new project? What is wrong with continuing with the pet project of the former first lady and making it more effective?

Going by the overall appraisal of comments from the opinion poll, there is mixed reactions but many respondents did not call for actual cancellation of first ladyship pet projects but only want some corrections to make them more effective and positively impactful on the people.

### **FIRST LADIES' PET PROJECTS: A GOOD RIDDANCE TO BAD RUBBISH?**

The paper traced the concept of *philanthropism* in Nigeria to cultural and religious obligation which is expected to be positively responded to. It argued that any willful attempt not to oblige the call to philanthropism in Nigeria is highly considered a sin against God and humanity. The interactions between the givers (philanthropists) and the takers (beneficiaries) have unconsciously led to an asymmetrical relationship where the philanthropists now dictate how the beneficiaries socially behave. The paper argued that political elites (of which the first ladies are inclusive) have since seized the opportunity to use *philanthropism* to expand the frontier of their political dynasty and foster their interests in the political space. The adoption of *philanthropism* as a political tool in Nigeria has also opened other doors of opportunities to the political class where they not only make political gains but also make social and economic gains, mostly at the expense of unsuspecting public and conservative beneficiaries.

The main thesis of the paper is that first ladies' engagement in philanthropic activities in the form of pet projects is not by will but by political circumstances as planted by Maryam Babangida when she first established the Office of the First Lady of Nigeria and floated the first pet project 'Better Life for Rural Women' in 1985. Since then, it has become a political norm in Nigeria for the wives of elected or appointed public office holders to float pet projects to do philanthropy. The paper argued that though there is a number of benefits that accrued to Nigerians from the pet projects, most evidently of which is the transformation of Maryam Abacha's National Hospital for women and children under her 'family support program' to the present 'National Hospital, Abuja' which hitherto was not in existence. However, there are more negative impacts, chiefly of which are their illegal fundraising activities and the lack of audit and accountability on how such funds were expended.

In addition, the first ladyship pet projects seem to be unconsciously damaging the productivity spirits of some Nigerians especially the beneficiaries on the ground that they will always opt for the perceived free 'largesse' and have no inclination towards self reliance. Several scholars have argued in favor of this notion. For instance, Carnegie (1993), Gross (2003) and Karl (1990) argued that philanthropy is a form of charitable acts that promote and sustain 'pauperism'. A situation where

most beneficiaries will not bother to opt for self reliance through economic productivity rather continuously dependent on the donors who subsequently uses them (the beneficiaries) for their own socio-political and economic profit end.

In conclusion therefore, this paper is not calling for the neutralization of first ladies' pet projects but is advocating for legislation from the Nigerian National Assembly to create a Commission or expand the powers of existing anti-graft agencies especially the Code of Conduct Bureau to monitor the activities of first ladies' pet projects; ensure that funds are not corruptly raised and audit their account on yearly basis to ensure accountability and transparency. It is hoped that if this is done, it will deter the usage of the pet projects for private and self enrichment and also diffuse the scramble by wives of public office holders to float pet projects without clear ideology and public interests. Moreover, it is not a crime for a first lady not to have pet project if there is no will for it.

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