

CONSTANCE M'MANEH SIRA SARONWIYO (1939-2015): A PRIDE TO WOMANHOOD IN THE NIGER DELTA

B.E. AWORTU, Ph.D
Phone: +234-7037142281
E-mail: bawortu@yahoo.com

UEBARI SAMUEL N-UE
Phone: +238037465667
Email: samuelnue12@yahoo.com
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND DIPLOMATIC STUDIES
IGNATIUS AJURU UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION
PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA.

Abstract

A leap into history brings to the limelight the gargantuan contributions of women to development. For centuries now, Niger Delta Women, like their counterparts nation wide, have conscientiously contributed to the country's developmental agenda. Regrettably, their immense contributions are down played in the existing historical literature. Against this backdrop, this paper attempts to consciously examine and document the role of Constance M.S. Saronwiyo, the first female graduate and scholar of Ogoni origin and the pioneer female Commissioner of Old Rivers State in the development of Niger Delta. This is hinged on the fact that awareness about her pioneering, iconic and pivotal role is relatively low and not well documented in the academic circle. This paper also interrogates the socio-cultural currents that influenced this woman of many parts, Constance, M.S. Saronwiyo. Utilizing the historical method and multi-disciplinary approach the work unearths the salient facts that Constance M.S. Saronwiyo was a pathfinder, prime contributor and role model of her age whose footprints endures and affects succeeding generations. This study highlights the profound lessons that could be learnt from the life and times of this legendary academic figure and great sage of our time. The paper recommends, among others, the mainstreaming of women in order for them to actively participate in the Nigerian project and help make Nigeria a better place.

Keywords: Contributions National Development, Women Education and Empowerment

Introduction

Nigerian women in general and Niger Delta women in particular have conscientiously played and will continue to play pivotal role in the overall development of Nigeria. They have succeeded in creating solid and irreversible platform for the younger generation to improve upon. In the Niger Delta, the life and times of Constance M' Maneh Sira Saronwiyo (1939-2015) depicted her as a pride to womanhood. Her pioneering and inspirational role in the political terrain and educational industry has produced light and hope at the end of various dark tunnels. Indeed, her worthy and admirable life is like a good book worth appreciating, digesting and reading.

Lamentably, her contributions and those of her counterparts elsewhere are down played in the existing historical literature, giving the false impression that the society is mainly composed of men. Awe (2003:3-4) espouses that:

An account that ignores their (women) contribution to development cannot be valid or reliable... Indeed, the absence of the account of women's contribution leaves out a whole sector of reality. The history of men is not necessarily the history of women.

Buttressing the consequences of the neglect of the female "enduring heroes" to our national development Ade Ajayi (2008:64-65).

*Perhaps, one reason why there is so much violence, aggression and instability in our day to day life is that we have so little consciousness of a time perspective. We act and react as if there is only today, no yesterday, no tomorrow. We seem to care so little about the past; we have no enduring heroes and we respect no precedents. Not surprisingly, we hardly ever consider what kind of a future we are building for our children and our children's children... **politics of the moment dominates our life, leaving no***

room for evaluating achievement or appreciating merit. We, therefore, recognize no permanent values or yardstick of achievement to hold up as models for our youths (emphasis ours).

Against this backdrop, the researchers considered it their ethical duty to clinically x-ray the life and times of Chief Dr. C.M.S. Saronwiyo- a distinguished and great pathfinder in the educational enterprise, an outstanding teacher/lecturer, an administrator *par excellence*, a nation builder, a great promoter of science education, a selfless mobilizer and an excellent model of her age -whose unaffordable footprints endure and affect succeeding generations. Apparently, she emerged as an eminent Nigerian woman from the Niger Delta.

Conceptual Clarification

There is the need to define the concept of pride as used in this work given that concept has varying meanings and definitions. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, pride is a "feeling of pleasure or satisfaction that you get when you or people who are connected with you have done something well or own something that other people admire". Similarly, BBC English Dictionary A Dictionary for the World (1992) sees pride as "a feeling of satisfaction which you have because you or people close to you have done something good or possess something good". To Funk and Wagnalls New International Dictionary of the English language (1989), pride is "that of which one is justly proud; a cause of exultation". Pride therefore means the acme of excellence achieved by an individual which elicit a feeling of triumphant joy, satisfaction, and proud in an individual or group.

The Cradle/Pedigree of C.M.S. Saronwiyo

It is a truism that human being is a product of nature, moulded by psychological and sociological phenomena. The interplay between man and these factors determined to a very large extent the pattern of man's relation with his fellow human beings on the one hand, and between man and his environment on the other. The phenomenon also underscores how man influenced the society and how the society in turn influenced the life of the man (Okorobia and Orji, 2005:111, Mene, 2010:2).

Constance M.S. Saronwiyo's background is traced to the Ogoni ethnic nationality, one of the distinct ethnic groups in the Niger Delta and precisely to Gwara community in today's Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. By dictate of ecological determinism, they are predestined to be farmers and fishermen. Nevertheless, they exchanged their surplus goods with the products of her neighbouring communities as no community is self-sufficient. Gwara, her native settlement, occupies a paramount place in the Ogoni history and by extension Niger Delta history. It is the abode of *Gbenebeka* deity, the national deity of the Ogoni people. The deity who is believed to have inflicted those who flouted her orders with chicken pox. She exercised tremendous influence in Ogoniland as a military and political figure as well as overwhelming spiritual powers over Ogoniland and her Ijaw neighbours (Akeekue, 2004:94-95, Kpone-Tonwe, 2003:13, Kpone-Tonwe, 2009:608). Pointedly, the Ogoni and their Ijaw neighbours consulted the *Gbenebeka* shrine at Gwara to enhance their fortune. In the process, Gwara acted as a centre of religious pilgrimage. The *Gbenebeka* devotees came to Gwara to worship, venerate and pay homage to the deity.

The advent of colonialism could not completely destroyed the spiritual powers of the *Gbenebeka* deity. The British destroyed the *Gbenebeka* shrine in 1914 but since it was believed to be supernatural, the deity continues to provide spiritual leadership for the Ogoni people. The deity continued to be a thorn in the flesh of the British and her tax policies in the area. Shute (1933:10) aptly describes the oracle as "the Chief cohesive force" among the Ogoni to oppose British colonial policies. For instance, the British colonial records in the area document that *Gbenebeka* decreed that "villages who paid their tax would be smitten with small pox" and this "caused considerable delay and obstruction in the collection of tax in the Southern Kana (Khana) area" (Shute, 1933:18).

The point, therefore, is that Gwara, the home town of our subject, was an important religious centre in Ogoniland. It follows, therefore, that traditional religion permeated almost all their life including politics, marriage, oath-taking, to mention but a few. A case in point was the Ogoni custom known as *Sirah* or *Biaken* culture. It is held in high esteem by the Gawara people. As Anokari (1986:89) perceptibly notes that the first daughter (*sira*) remained at home to raise up children via a chosen man who must 'stay with her' through certain rituals necessary within Ogoni tradition. But the children belong to the girl's home". However, in their recent study on the area, Igbara and Keenam (2013:66) argue persuasively that "there was never a period in Ogoni history when such a practice existed". The father of Constance M.S. Saronwiyo was traditionally bound to obey

the *Sira* custom because his father was the first *Gbenemene* of Babbe clan. By implication, Constance M.S. Saronwiyo was born a princess.

Mr. (later Chief) Fihto M. Saronwiyo was the first son of Late Chief Nwiyo Nwizua, one-time President of Baen Native Court (Sylvester Nwigbo, 11-06-2011). Due to his influential credentials, Fihto Saronwiyo became one of the major beneficiaries of the Western style education in Ogoniland. As a result, he belonged to the crop of early Ogoni elite. Fihto taught at various levels under the Christian missionaries, including the famous Birabi Memorial Grammar School (Igbara, 2009:30). Piqued by the socio-political backwardness of the Ogoni, Fihto M.A. Saronwiyo was poised to draw his people from the backwaters. He joined forces with other Ogoni leaders to form the Ogoni Central Union (O.C.U.), a socio-cultural organization in 1945. He served as Secretary while Mr. Suanu Finimale was the President. It was under the aegis of this noble body that a grand reception was organized in honour of Hon. T.N. Paul Birabi when he returned from the United Kingdom in 1948 (Loolo, 1981:21, Ntor-ue, 2005:120). What is more, F.M.A. Saronwiyo, still determined to liberate his people from the firm grip of the Igbo's internal colonialism, served as Secretary of the Ogoni State Representative Assembly (O.S.R.A.) with late Chief S.E. Nwikina and C.J. Monsi as President and Treasurer respectively. It is important to note that following the establishment of the Eastern House of Assembly in 1951, Paul T.N. Birabi and F.M.A. Saronwiyo were elected as Ogoni representatives on the platform of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) on November, 27 1951 (Anokari, 1986:146, Gbenenye, 1988:94, Daminabo, 2005:291, Ntor-ue, 2005:210.). Impressively, Chief (Hon.) F.M.A. Saronwiyo served the late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996), the then Premier of the Eastern Region (1959-1963) as a Parliamentary Secretary (Loolo, 1981:47-48, Robinson, 2005:196). Ironically, a man of his standing discriminated against female education. We shall see more of this later in this work.

Mrs. Sylvana Korneh Saronwiyo was the first wife of Chief F.M.A. Saronwiyo, who also hailed from Gwara town. She was very supportive, respectful, humane and diligent. Although, she had no formal education, she was naturally endowed with Ogoni native wisdom. She was a first class seamstress and renowned artist during her days. Sylvana was an expert in body painting, tattooing, hair plaiting, weaving and basket making. As informal education was acquired through imitation and observation, young Constance imbibed these special skills from her beloved mother and this paved the way for her later in her adult life. Additionally, Constance's mother found time, especially in the evening of the day, to tell young Constance folktales, local history, myths, proverbs and other essential virtues needed for her future life. Doubtlessly, Constance's tender and impressionistic mind was captured by these teachings. Until her demise on 21st November, 2015, Constance was well versed in Ogoni history and culture.

Constance M.S. Saronwiyo's Birth and Up-bringing

Born on the 9th March, 1939 at Bien Gwara in Babbe clan of Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State to the union of Chief (Hon.) Fihto M.A. Saronwiyo and Mrs. Sylvana Korneh Saronwiyo. She was the first daughter (*Sira* in Ogoni parlance). Given her historical background, the proud mother of four boys and four grand children, Constance Saronwiyo was also a crown princess. As the first daughter (*Sira*) with royal blood flowing in her veins, Constance Saronwiyo was given a thorough training which later informed her accommodating personality, unfeigned humility, total dedication to family and above all, the fear of God. Young Constance never went through the *Bogo-Koo* institution which prepared women of pre-marital age to be better future wives and mothers (Kpone-Tonwe, 2003:52, Yirakina, 2010:98-99, Abalubu, 2011:71). Perhaps, this was due to the long period of seclusion attached to the initiation ceremony. Added to this was her mother's preference for western civilization to *Bogo Koo*.

What is certain is that Constance Saronwiyo never escaped the influence of the *Sira* culture. She was married to Late Dr. George Azubuike Wigwe of Umule, Aba. But she lacked the muscles to fight against the "Sira culture" imposed on her by the custom of the Ogoni. Her parents protested and compelled her to observe it by dropping her husband's name and to adopt her maiden name.

The young Constance Saronwiyo attended several primary schools from 1946 to 1952 both within Ogoni and outside Ogoniland. She started her primary education at Methodist School, Taabaa in 1946, and moved to Onne Central School in 1948, from there to Oza Central School, Asa in 1949, St. Paul's School, Nonwa 1951-1952 (Robinson, 2005:197, N-ue, 2014:9). Constance paid the price of nomadic primary education due to the frequent transfer posting of her father from one place to the other. Robinson (2005:190-197) sharply notes that:

... Young Constance had the privilege of sojourning to many parts of the country especially within the Eastern Region with her father during her primary school days. And because of this exposure to different environments, languages and culture, Constance became socially active early in life. She was more or less a local linguist;

she speaks all the Ogoni dialects, many dialects of the Ibo language and bits of Hausa and Yoruba.

What seems to be Constance's paradox came immediately after her primary education. Her father, though a renowned receiver of the "Light of the New Age", bluntly refused to train her beyond primary school level. To complicate matters, none of the female members of Saronwiyo's family can justifiably thumb her chest to say that she completed her secondary education. During her days, the Ogoni people, whether literate or not, did not consider the training of girl child as a worthwhile venture (N-ue, 2014:9). Constance's mother refused to be part of that culture when she vowed to support Constance's post primary education. Of the three admissions offered to Constance, she settled for Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girls' School Elelenwo (1953-1957) mainly due to proximity. In her class three stage of her secondary school career, a big threat came her way but the quick intervention of the White Missionary Teachers scholarship saved her career. The White Missionary teachers quickly discovered that Constance Saronwiyo was not a gift to be thrown away because she "had established her self in school as an "all-rounder", she was not only brilliant, she was also richly endowed with natural talents. She had become the school's jewel in sports, music, and other competitive events" (Robinson, 2005:198). She triumphantly emerged on the Ogoni educational ladder as the first Ogoni girl to attend and successfully completed secondary school in 1957.

Her insatiable appetite for western education also compelled Constance Saronwiyo to crave for tertiary education, a desire which was very rare in her days among the Ogoni women and most men. Riding on the back on the White Missionary teachers, the first daughter of Chief F.M.A. Saronwiyo schooled at Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology in Igboland, from 1958 to 1961. Having acquired her Advanced Level Certificate, Constance Saronwiyo secured admission into Fourah Bay College, Free Town in Sierra Leone (affiliated to University of Durham, England, U.K.). She started in 1962 and completed in 1966 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Chemistry. By this rare achievement, she became the first female science graduate in Eastern region. In 1975, she took another bold step to upgrade herself when she went to the College of Medicine, University of Benin and ended in 1977, capping her academic exploit with a Ph.D in Chemical Pathology from University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in 1981. It is important to point out that she ultimately transferred her chain of academic qualifications to serve humanity and to rubbish the spirit of backwardness faced by her people.

Work Career and Legacies

Determined with the zeal and zest to meaningfully contribute to the advancement of mankind, Dr. Constance M.S. Saronwiyo started her eventful work career in 1958 as a pupil teacher. She also taught in Anglican Girl's School, Ovom, Aba as a science teacher till the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70) and the Birabi Memorial Grammar School (B.M.G.S.) Bori, after the Nigerian Civil War to 1971. In early, 1971, she was appointed the foundation principal of the First Girl's Secondary School in Ogoniland, Marian High School, Bane (Anokari, 1986:164, N-ue, 2014:9). She also conscientiously served in the then Rivers State College of Science and Technology as a foundation Chemistry lecturer. She later picked up an appointment with the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) Medical School to teach anatomy.

Quite significantly, the woman of charm bequeathed an enviable track record as a thorough and competent teacher/lecturer and an astute, exemplary as well as a fine researcher. For example, as pioneer woman science teacher East of the Niger, she established Science laboratories in Post Primary Schools in the erstwhile Eastern Region. This is true of Community Secondary School, Luanwi and Community Secondary School Gwara, among others. Besides, her consistent teaching of the elemental values of truth, love, peace, patience, hard work, and progress imbibed by her students across the nation had given fillip to National Development. Even as a foundation principal of the first Girls' School in Ogoni, she devoted her energies to the growth of women's education in the new state.

Her legacies as a University don are also worthwhile and worthy of emulation. She made ground breaking researches and had them published in the *Tropical Medical Journal*, a well celebrated scholarly Science Journal to deepen the frontier of knowledge. Such prominent scholarly works include, "contraceptive Values of Indigenous plants", "Indigenous herbs in Breast Cancer Control" among others. As a patriotic and disciplined Nigerian, she seized the opportunity to instill and inculcate in her students the essential ingredients of development such as hard work, excellence, diligence, integrity, originality and good morale. The courageous and visionary lecturer always admonished and motivated her students to pursue distinction and perfection in all their endeavours.

Public Service and Legacies

Due to her unparalleled leadership acumen, Dr. Constance M.S. Saronwiyo was entrusted with enviable positions of trust and responsibility in several emerging institutions across the new state. Suffice to note that the role model to many was appointed in 1971 to serve as a member in the Emeritus Professor E.J. Alagoa led first Board of the Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture from 1972 to 1975. Again, when the first *Argungu* festival was held in then Sokoto state and the first Arts Culture Festival was held in then Kaduna State in 1972, Constance Saronwiyo was appointed by the Military Governor of Rivers State, Alfred Papa Preye Diète Spiff (28 May 1967-July, 1975) to lead the state contingents. Rivers State came first. Through her wonderful contributions, the Alagoa led council made several landmark achievements which did not only reposition the state on the fast lane of development but also brought glory and fame to the young state, winning many medals for the state at various national festivals of arts, carrying out archeological investigation into the past of Rivers State from May 1973 onward, organization of workshops for fine artists, the provision of accommodation for the Rivers Readers Project whose aim was the study of the indigenous languages of the state and above all the launch of a Cultural Journal entitled *Oduma* from 1973 to 1977 (Awe, 2005:76-77, Alagoa, 2013:145-147, Derefaka, 2005:83-84). Okorobia and Orji (2005:122) were absolutely correct when they beautifully describe Alagoa's tenure (1972 to 1975) at the Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture as "the golden years of that council".

As the dictum goes "a gold fish has no hiding place". She was again relied upon to represent Rivers State in the National Council for Arts and Culture which was later called the Committee for Nigeria's Participation in the famous FESTAC' 77. She was the head of the popular Dressing Committee. For three years, she toured the length and breadth of Nigeria to mobilize Nigerians. She masterfully and artistically crafted the Nigerian dressing akin to the popular Ogoni *Bogo Koo* art and Nigeria clinched the first prize of *gong* (now called gold metal) out of 56 countries that participated in the event. It is historically refreshing to note that the main kernels of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) which was held in Lagos, Nigeria in 1977 and attended by more than 35,000 visitors from 56 countries across the world were to promote Black and African civilizations, preservation of African cultures, bring to light the diverse contributions of Black and African peoples to the universal currents of thought and to promote African artists, performers and writers and facilitate their world acceptance and their access to world outlets" (Otoghagua, 1999:717). The female scientist also served the country as a member of National Planning and National Council on Statistics, 1982-1983 (Ogolo, Njiowhor, Ochonma, et al 2013:266).

Owing to her exceptional performance and landmark roles in administration, Late Chief (Senator) Melford Obiene Okilo, upon assuming office on 1st October, 1979 as the Executive Governor of Rivers State, appointed the first daughter of Chief F.M.A. Saronwiyo, a non-career politician, as Commissioner of Special Duties in charge of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Scholarship and Women Affairs from 1979 to 1982 and later she was given the portfolio of Economic Development and Planning, a position she held until the military junta seized power on 31st December, 1983 (Loolo, 1981:48, Robinson, 2005:196, Daminabo, 2005:245:291, 2013:96, Pandem, 2013:206). The point to note strongly is that even when the appointment coincided with her travelling abroad for her fellowship, she accepted the offer in order to serve her state. She, therefore, have a place in Rivers history as the first female to be appointed into the exalted office of a Commissioner.

The preponderant weight of evidence at our disposal point to the fact that Dr Constance M.S. Saronwiyo never earned a degree in public administration but she effectively used her portfolios to prove the critics of women emancipation wrong and earned a mark as an administrator *par excellence*. Although, she was a good team player but if a good administrator, according to Derefeka (2005:81) "identifies, deploys, and utilizes human resources at his disposal adequately to achieve set goals within target time frames", then Constance Saronwiyo was a good administrator. She effectively managed the human and material resources as well as time with a view to ensuring that her ministries and the state achieved their stated objectives. We must also note that she convinced the first Executive Governor of Rivers State, Late Chief (Senator) M.E. Okilo on the urgent need to upgrade the College of Science and Technology built by the Alfred Diète-Spiff military regime in 1972 to a University status and the Rivers State College of Education to the status of a degree awarding institution. Accordingly, the College of Science and Technology was upgraded and named University of Science and Technology. By this transformation, the institution became the premier state-owned University of Science and Technology (RSUST). Likewise, the Rivers State College of Education became a degree awarding institution (affiliated to the premier University in Nigeria, University of Ibadan). All these took place during her watch. Significantly, these ivory towers helped and are helping to satisfy the man-power needs of the state especially in the industrial and educational sectors.

Also, it has to be noted that she used her revered position of Commissioner of Economic Development and Planning which oversaw labour and employment in the state to better the lot of the women folk. Through her efforts, Rivers women were empowered as contractors, workers, and suppliers in the state during her period in office. At this juncture, what we need to emphasize is that her pioneering leadership role and outstanding

performances had opened the flood gate of appointments, opportunities, honours, awards and titles to Rivers women, leading to the creation of full fledged Rivers State Ministry of Women Affairs in 1997 in order to promote gender equality and empower women and girls in the state. The foundation commissioner was Mrs. Julie Wika (1997-1999). Without embellishment, no political office in the state is left sacrosanct for the male folk today. For example, Mrs. Mediline Tador became the first female Commissioner of Information (Feb. 1987-Feb. 1989), Dr. Mrs. Ipalibo Banigo the first woman to serve as the Head of Service, Rivers State (April 1998-Oct 1998), Dr. (Mrs.) Roseline S. Konya served as the first chairman of the Civil Service Commission (1995-1997), and the first female Commissioner, Ministry of Commerce (July-October, 2007), Mrs. Aleruchi Cookey Gam the first female Commissioner of the Ministry of Justice (1999-2003), Mrs. Inime Aguma served as Commissioner of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation, (July 2007 – October 2007), Mrs. Sarah Ntor-ue, first female Commissioner of Education (Jan. 1999-May, 1999), Prof (Mrs.) Roseline Konya Pioneer Commissioner of Environment (2003-2007), Mrs. Ngor Ogan, first female Commissioner of Health (June, 1985-Nov. 1985), to mention but a few (Pandey, 2013:133, Robinson, 2005:122-156, 203-2016, Daminabo, 2013:97-98, Ogolo, Njiowhor, Salan, Ochonma, et al 2013:5,275). Indeed, she truly demystified the saying that “women’s education ends in the kitchen” and proved beyond all doubts that “when you educate a woman, you educate the nation”.

In recognition of her star and pioneering roles, Constance Saronwiyo was honoured by the Late King (Dr.) Mark Tsaro Igbara the *Gbenemene* of Babbe Kingdom with the prestigious chieftaincy title of *Tuago Neewa Babbe*, meaning “First Eagle Lady”, in 1982 (Igbara, 2009:89). By this conferment, she emerged on the socio-cultural ladder as the first female to be given chieftaincy title in Rivers State. Additionally, it is pertinent to note that the auspicious and epoch making event was also used to confer the title of *Mene Aabee* (meaning Chief of new political era) on the then Governor of the State, Late Chief (Senator) M.O. Okilo (October, 1979-Dec. 1983).

It has to be mentioned that during her membership of the 10th and 11th Governing Councils of Rivers State University of Science and Technology (2008-2015), the institution experienced a leap frog in her profile. The University, indeed, occupied the 12th position as the best University in Nigeria and the best state owned University in Nigeria, necessitating encomiums, awards and unprecedented recognition within and outside Nigeria. Specifically, as the Head of Committee on Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), RSUST chapter for three years, she took proactive steps to bring to an end ASUU’s incessant strikes in the University, stressing that ASUU strike is the sole business of Federal Universities. Professor Blessing C. Didia, the Vice Chancellor of the institution vividly testifies:

The late Chief Dr. Saronwiyo has been associated with the University since its formative years. She was a pioneer academic staff in the Department of Chemistry, from where she proceeded overseas for her Doctoral Degree. She was to return to the University at the highest level of policy making when she was appointed a member of the Governing Council of the University by the Rivers State Government in 2008. She served as a member of the 10th and 11th Governing Council of the University until 2015. She was a resource person to most council committees and provided superior discussions at council meeting (Didia, 2015:40).

The Registrar of RSUST, Mrs. D.C. Odimabo reaffirms that:

HRH. Dr. Constance M.S Saronwiyo was a two-term member of the Governing Council of our University. She was in the 10th and 11th Governing Councils of the University and served creditably in various committees of the council. She contributed immensely to the educational advancement of the University and served in various capacities in the development of the entire Rivers State (Odimabo, 2015:41).

It is worthy to add that in order to complement state government’s efforts and her desire to impact positively on humanity, she established the first private school in Ogoniland in 1980. The school, *Tuanu Day Care Centre*, situated at Bori, no doubt, contributed hugely to the educational and manpower development of Ogoni in particular and Rivers State in general. Apart from this, the *Tuago Neewa Babbe* also floated a private scholarships scheme to assist the downtrodden in the society. The tireless philanthropist and great humanist had brought light, hope and succor into the darkest homes today. We cannot afford to deny her a place of honour in history or “hall of fame” as a great woman mobilizer. Using her position as the pioneer National President,

Archdeacon Crowther Girls School, Elemenwo (A.C.M.G.S.) Old Girls' Association (1980-1988), the proprietress of the Tuanu Day Care Centre effectively sensitized and mobilized old girls of the school to play a better role in the society as mothers of future leaders.

Contributions to the Anglican Church

The journey of Dr. Constance M.S. Saronwiyo into the spiritual domain was also impactful. Her commitment and dedication to the service of God started way back when the church and school were fused into organic whole. Thus, her local evangelist(s) also served as the school teachers. This development greatly influenced her decisions to the things of God. Little or no surprise that she faithfully keyed into the kingdom business, Constance M.S. Saronwiyo demonstrated genuine love for church music and enthusiasm in Anglicanism resulting into spreading and deepening the salvation of Jesus Christ in this part of the country. She conscientiously served on Diocesan Boards and represented the several Diocese as General synod delegates of Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion (1991-2004), Education Secretary, Diocese of Niger Delta North of Nigeria Anglican Union (2000-2004), and General Secretary, Eminent Anglican Resource Group Implementation Committee (2000-2004) (Ogolo, Njiowhor, Salan, Ochonma et al, 2013:266). As secretary in these capacities, her work comprised writing correspondence, notices of meetings, minutes of meetings and replying letters in and outside the Diocese. We must understand that Constance's example of combining academics with God's work has encouraged and motivated many scholars in the Lord's vineyard. It will not be too much to add that her passion for her local church compelled her to be not only a regular worshipper but also the greatest donor of fuel on weekly basis to power light in the church.

The woman of many parts, Constance M.S. Saronwiyo was the Managing Director, Tuanu Khana Limited, a private consulting firm into oil spillage and contracting. She was also the Secretary-General of the Niger Delta Network for Environmental Management (NIDENEM), a non-non-governmental outfit on "Niger Delta Question" (1998-2000) (Ogolo, Njiowhor, Salan, Ochonma et al, 2013:266, Robinson, 2005:199). She consistently advocated for zero-tolerance for environmental pollution and oil spillage. Like her mother, the medical scientist was an exceptional artist. She won the Niger Delta Development Commission's "Logo/Motto" Award.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to investigate the life and times of Constance, M.S. Saronwiyo, the first daughter of the Ogoni foremost nationalist, Chief F.M. Saronwiyo. Our findings disclosed that the multi-talented enigma and an icon made her indelible marks on the sand of times as the "first of firsts" and excellent political pathfinder of the League of women in Old Rivers State and Niger Delta at large. She proudly wrote her name in gold as the first Ogoni woman to acquire secondary school education, the first female graduate in Ogoniland, the first female medical scientist in Eastern Nigeria, the first female principal of the First Girls' Secondary School in Ogoniland, the first female Commissioner in Old Rivers State and the first Rivers State woman to be conferred with a high profile Chieftaincy title of *Tuago Neewa Babbe*. Apparently, she had emerged not only as the pride to Old Rivers State but also to Niger Delta as a whole.

Arising from this, it behooves on the present generation and leaders not only to celebrate her by borrowing a cue from her sterling leadership qualities especially now that there are many leaders but practically too little leadership to show but also to afford women enough pace to operate so that Nigeria can make progress. This is attainable if mass literacy programmes for women is embarked upon, effective sensitization of rural women in order to raise their socio-political consciousness, and a comprehensive empowerment package for women across borders is put in place.

REFERENCES

- Abalubu, T.A. (2011) "Ogoni Systems of Marriage over Time: A Comparative Analysis". An M.A. Thesis submitted to the Graduate School University of Port Harcourt, Department of History and Diplomatic Studies.
- Ade-Ajayi (2008). "History and Society" in C.B.N. Ogbogbo and O.O. Okpeh (Eds.) *Interrogating Contemporary Africa Dike Memorial Lecturers 1999-2007*. Ibadan: Historical society of Nigeria.
- Akekue, M.N. (2004). *Who are the Ogoni?* Bori Ogoni: Trumpet Publishers.
- Alagoa, E.J. (2013). "A Cultural Perspective" in E.J. Alagoa and J. Nwanodi (Eds.) *Port Harcourt at 100 Past, Present and Future*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications.
- An oral interview with Sylvester Nwigbo at Baen town on 11th June, 2011. Retired Banker. Age: 69 years.
- Anokari, N.B. (1986). *Nigerian Inheritance: A History of the Ogoni*. Port Harcourt: Ano Publication Company (APC).

- Awe, B. (2003). "Women in Nigerian History: Rivers and Bayelsa States Experience" in N.C. Ejituwu and A.O.I. Gabriel (Eds.) *Women in Nigerian History: The Rivers and Bayelsa States Experiences*: Port Harcourt. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications.
- Awortu, B.E. (2014). *A Comparative Study of Minority Struggle*. Port Harcourt: Alheribooks.
- B.B.C English Dictionary A Dictionary For the World (1992). Onitsha: Africana Fep Publishers Limited.
- Daminabo, A. (2005). *Ken Saro-Wiwa 1941-1995: His Life and Legacies*. Buguma: Hanging Gardens Publishers.
- Daminabo, A. (2013). *The Story of Port Harcourt, 1913-2013*: Port Harcourt: Hanging Gardens Publishers.
- Derefaka, A.M. (2005). "Professor E.J. Alagoa: The Administrator" in N.C. Ejituwu, A.A. Derefaka, A.M. Okorobia, D. Alagoa and J.H. Enemugwem (Eds.) *History Concourse -2005. A celebration of the Life and Work of Professor E.J. Alagoa*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications.
- Didia, B.C. (2015) "Condolence Message" in the Funeral Programme of Late Chief Dr. Constance M'Maneh Sira Saronwiyo, December.
- Funk and Wagnalls New International Dictionary of the English Language (1989) Comprehensive Edition. London: J.G. Ferguson Publishing Company.
- Gbenenye, E.M. (1988) "A Political History of Ogoni From Early Times to 1960" An M.A. Thesis submitted to the University of Port Harcourt, Department of History and Diplomatic Studies.
- Igbara, P.I. (2009). *The Making of a Monarch: A Biographical Account of the Life and Times of King (Dr.) Mark Tsaro Igbara (JP)*. Port Harcourt: LSB Publishing.
- Kpone-Tonwe, S. (2003). *Youth and Leadership Training in the Niger Delta: The Ogoni Example*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications.
- Kpone-Tonwe, S. and Gbenenye, E.M. (2009) "Izon and their Ogoni neighbours" in E.J. Alagoa, T.N. Tamuno, and J.P. Clark (Eds.) *The Izon of the Niger Delta*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications.
- Loolo, G.N. (1981). *A History of Ogoni*, Port Harcourt: N.P.
- Mene, C. (2010). "Venerable Kingsley Okechukwu Amadi: The Unfolding Saga of a quiet Nation Builder" in A. Orugbani (Ed.) *History Public Service and Leadership in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Venerable K.O. Amadi*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research publications.
- Ntor-ue, R.T. (2005). *Leadership Legacy in Ogoniland*. Port Harcourt: Marvelous Publishing Coy, (APC).
- N-ue, U.S. (2014) "A Toast to Constance Saro-nwiyo at 75" in *The Tide*, Wednesday March 19, vol.13 No.345.
- Odimabo, D.C. (2015) "Condolence Message" in The Funeral Programme of Late Chief Dr. Constance M' Maneh Sira Saronwiyo, December.
- Ogolo, C., Njiowhor, C.J., Salan, B., and Ochoma, V. (Eds.) (2013). *Eminent Persons of Rivers State*, vol.1, Port Harcourt: Rivers State Newspaper Corporation.
- Okorobia, A.M. and Orji, K.E. (2005). "Alagoa as An Intellectual Leader" in N.C. Ejituwu, A.A. Derefaka, A.M. Okorobia, D. Alagoa an J.H. Enemugwem (Eds.) *History Concourse 2005. A Celebration of the Life and Work of Professor E.J. Alagoa*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications.
- Otoghagua, E. (1999). *Trends and Contemporary Issues on Regimes of Nigerian Heads of state Policies and politics Achievements and Failures*. Benincity: University of Benin Research Knowledge and Educational Services.
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1999) 7th Edition International Students' Edition. London: Oxford University Press.
- Panden, P.E. (2013). *Rivers State At 46: A Compendium*. Jos: Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited.
- Robinson, K. (2005). *Journeys to Success Rivers Women of Achievement*: Port Harcourt: Nduka Printing Ltd.
- Shute, (1933). Annual Report of Opobo Division. Opodist 3.2/6.
- Uneh, E.J. (2006). "Niger Delta Women in Historical Perspective: From Earliest Times to AD 2000". A Ph.D Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School, University of Port Harcourt, Department of History and Diplomatic Studies.
- Yirakina, C.N. (2010). *The Role of Cultural and Traditional Institutions of Ogoniland (History)*. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited.