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Women's human rights protection in Nigeria: Prospects and challenges

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Abstract

The subjugation of women and violation of their human rights are among the burning issues which have captivated public outcry and condemnation the world over. Injustice to women emanating from discrimination, gender inequality, culture and patriarchy, illiteracy, society, poverty, conflict situations, environmental challenges and so on are dimensions of breach of women's rights which this paper considers because they constitute challenges in regard to females' safety and civil liberties. From basically a doctrinal standpoint, this paper appraises the challenges and prospects to females' rights protection in Nigerian nation. The aim is fundamentally to expose the danger women generally and Nigerian women in particular face in the light of a continually affront to their human rights protection. This paper finds that if the identified challenges can be contained, the human rights protection of women will be viable. It concludes that women's rights protection enhances peace and development and recommends its sustenance.

Keywords: Women, human rights, women's rights

Introduction

Irrespective of the vital role women play in the homes and society in general, they are subjected to discrimination. There is in existence disparity in the laws with respect to women and children vis-à-vis those pertaining to adult males. The disparities do not recognize women as persons in their own right but as appendages as well as necessary adjuncts to their husbands or male relations. This position is against the tenets of United Nations on the Declaration of Human Rights including other international and domestic Laws. As a result of this erroneous conception, anytime women achieve great feats, society rapidly attributes them to the male folk. Conversely, in some instances, women are harassed or arrested in lieu of criminal suspects. Wives at one point in time or the other have borne the brunt of such unconstitutional conduct from the police and other law enforcement agencies. They are all too conveniently viewed virtually as the *alter ego* of their husbands or male relatives to be visited with different types of reprisals in place of their husbands or at times together with them ^[1] In *Bosede Obisi v The Nigerian Navy* ^[2] the Respondent's agents conducted a search in the home of the Applicant, on the ground that the Applicant's husband, a Naval Officer, had committed some offences under the service law. While conducting the search, the Applicant's passport was seized. In an application for the enforcement of her fundamental right to freedom of movement, the Applicant contended that the seizure of her passport was unwarranted as the husband had collected his passport and the cellular phone from the Navy which were seized during the search. The Applicant averred that she had nothing to do with the Navy apart from been married to a Naval personnel. She therefore prayed for the release of the passport and payment of general damages of N10 million as compensation. In its judgment, the Federal High Court (*per* Tsoho J.) held among others that from the stated facts of the Applicant's case, it is clear that the subject of punitive mission was the Applicant's husband who was personnel of the Navy. The court further held that in a civilized setting, she ought not to be made to take punishment for perceived misdeeds of her husband. This is because there is no vicarious liability under our criminal justice system.

Women's rights are violated with impunity in many parts of society. The question arises as to what are the impediments to the security and actualization of the rights of women. This article intends to beam a searchlight on the constraints and feature of women's rights in Nigeria. Possible identification and dealing with the challenges to women's rights protection will accord women their deserved position by virtue of their humanity.

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Conceptual Appraisal

Women

In accordance with The New Lexicon Webster Dictionary of English Language ^[3], 'a woman is an adult female human being'. Contrarily, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa ^[4] provides that "Women" means person of female gender, including girls. According to its etymology, from the biblical point of view, the Hebrew word meaning "woman or wife" is derived from a root word 'i-n-sh', which means "to be soft, delicate" ^[5]. The specific word 'Ishsha' for "woman", gives insight to her unique providential sensitivities and gifts in the emotional realm. These serve to enhance human beings. A female possesses a special sensitivity which prompts and assists her to comprehend instinctively the state of affairs and feelings of other humans ^[6]. As posited by Ogwu, the idea of 'ladies' is characterized as: 'Female part of the human species who separated from filling in as a vehicle for supporting life, likewise a maker, a buyer and a similarly enriched specialist for cultivating a healthy political, social and monetary advancement in the society ^[7]. This work is of the same opinion with the various definitions of "woman" given by the authors. In addition to these definitions, Tony-Sampson ^[8] views that "woman" is a burden-bearer and an epitome of a perfect gift from God to mankind.

Discussing on the precarious situation of women, Oputa viewed that women from cradle have a chequered history of being regarded as inferior to their male counterparts. There exists male preference in society particularly in some parts of Nigeria such as Igbo land. Inherent in the myths and folklores, culture, tradition and in the way of life of many human communities was and still is the subjugation of women from time immemorial ^[9]. The status of female folks has throughout the years been a reason for grave worry in each culture and in each clime. In certain region of the globe, it has passed the phase of thoughtful concern and has entered a period of hostile feminist movement ^[10].

Unmarried women are lightly esteemed. To have a husband or to be married is viewed as *sin aqua non* to be recognized as a responsible woman ^[11]. This is discriminatory and a challenge to womenfolk's civil liberties.

Human Rights

Irespective of the repeated claims and assertions made for their existence in the nature of man's inalienable right from creation, prominent Jurists like Azinge ^[12], have argued that to suggest a precise definition of human rights may prove an onerous or highly elusive task. On his own part, Ngwakawe views that 'Human rights do not yield to easy definition and so there is no unimpeachable certainty and precision about its meaning' ^[13]. It will perhaps be right to begin the definition of human rights with the late Kayode Esho. According to him in *Saude v Abdullahi* ^[14].

Human rights are not just mere rights. They are fundamental. They belong to the citizen. These rights have always existed even before Orderliness prescribed rules for the manner they are to be sought' ^[15]. These rights have to stand above the ordinary laws of the land and are antecedent to the political society itself. Human rights are, and must be a primary condition to civilized existence.

Modern constitutions contain specific provisions or reference to human rights guaranteed under the law which are termed Fundamental rights, Constitutional rights, Bill of

rights and so on. It is instructive that those rights specifically provided in the substantive parts of the Constitution qualify unquestionably to be called human rights of the citizens. The issues that stand out in human rights are that they are beyond all other laws of the land in whatever form these civil liberties were in existence before society itself. Put differently, Nigerians had these enriched freedoms and gotten the state together with them. States over the long haul just recognize what has been in existence by accommodating them in their Constitutions. It being "essential condition to a socialized presence" pontificates the regard for basic liberties - that there are in a general sense two social orders; cultivated and unrefined. Igwe asserts that it is "human rights respect test" that is the separation ^[16]. To this end, the nations that esteem and implement human rights are regarded as civilized states. Nations existence is strictly to apply the civil rights of the people as it were. Constantly, the nations that breach human rights of their citizens are impeached and statehood of such states is jeopardized until they right their wrong.

Igwe contrarily views human rights 'as cherished entitlements endowed upon every person in virtue only of being a human and which are not extinguishable by derogations (even when they are massively consistent and systematic) as they carry the status of innateness, being inherent, inalienable and therefore immutable' ^[17]. Tony-Sampson perceives human rights 'as unconditional and inalienable gift from God to persons by virtue of their humanity'. In general contemplation of human rights issues, it suffices to state that human rights have come to occupy the centre stage in world affairs.

The importance and emergency of human rights protection was accentuated by the laboratory of human rights abuse, cruelty and oppression of the Nazi Germany or regime before and during the Second World War. The horrifying violations against humankind, generally apparent in the elimination of millions of individuals in inhumane imprisonments, astonished the cultivated world and helped with carrying basic liberties security to spotlight and to the current degree of acknowledgment and worthiness. Crime against humanity has been perpetuated in a lesser scale as compared with those of the Germans for instance by the Serbs in former Yugoslavia as well as the Hutus in Burundi and so on. The genocide or pogrom against the Easterners residing in former Northern Nigeria which crisis led to the Nigeria civil war is seen in the same light. Avoidance of a repeat action of such brutality, inhumanity, plunder and senseless massacre, led to redefinition of the position of man by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 ^[18]. The rights are universal, being applicable to all human beings everywhere. Other instruments responsible for the development of human rights concept include the British *Magna Carter* 1215, British Bill of Rights 1689 and American Declaration of Independence of 1776. Human Rights law in Nigeria is contained principally in Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution (as Amended) dealing with fundamental rights. According to Unegbe, Fundamental Rights in Nigeria came into our Constitution in 1960 on the recommendation of the Willicks Commission of Inquiry into the problems of the minorities and avenues of allaying their fears in the impending independent Nigeria ^[19].

Women's Rights

Women are female human beings. The rights of women are human rights. According to Nnadi, the assertion that

“women’s rights are human rights” was made popular by Senator Hilary Clinton and wife of former President Bill Clinton of the United States of America. This statement resonated at the Beijing Conference in China in 1995 and thereafter apparently summarizes the yearnings, struggle and aspirations of women the world over from time immemorial^[20]. Women’s rights are essential part of human rights. It connotes in effect that rights due to one gender is automatically due to another. Therefore, Reanda maintains that the rights of women are of universal application, everlasting and unchangeable in the same way as human rights itself^[21].

Global basic freedoms principles are typically framed in sexually impartial terms. Hence, the expression "human" incorporates all kinds of people and it is accepted that these principles give programmed insurance to ladies in the very way that they do to men. Okagbue has contended that this "impartiality" regularly sums by and by to a negligence of ladies including an inability to react to ladies' particular encounters of unfairness^[22].

The United Nation’s publication on, “The World’s Women, 1995” in referring to injustice to women states that there is still a long way to go: “Too often, women and men live in different worlds, it reports, words that differ in access to education and work opportunities and in health, personal security and leisure time”^[23].

Interventions for the Protection of Women’s Human Rights

(i) Legislative Interventions

Increased awareness of injustice to women has prompted states to make legislations aimed at women’s rights protection. For instance, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa^[24] made provisions for the rights of women. Prominent amongst the provisions are: Right to exceptional insurance of Older ladies; Right to Unique assurance of ladies with Inabilities, Right to extraordinary insurance of ladies in Trouble and Right to credit offices^[25]. This article is firmly of the opinion that the provisions of the Women Protocol (as it is popularly known) are comprehensive and all-encompassing in that they captured all facets of women’s rights many of which have been trampled upon or neglected over the years.

The UN has equally given certain striking international human rights instruments to secure the privileges of ladies. A portion of the Treaties and Declarations that secure the basic liberties of ladies and expect states to make a move to incorporate them include: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)^[26], the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women^[27] as well as Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW)^[28], the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action^[29], Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute)^[30], Millennium Declaration^[31], and Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security^[32]. To guarantee the safety of the privileges of ladies the world over, notwithstanding the above-stated global instruments, the UN General Assembly established the UN Women among others geared towards the facilitation, strengthening and human capacity building of women in all ramifications^[33]. The United Nations also monitors the progress made on

the protection with respect to ladies’ rights via its institutional mechanisms like the UN Special Investigator responsible for Trafficking of Persons, particularly Women and Children; UN Reporter on the violation of Women, its sources including the effects and so on^[34].

Back home, aside from the Constitution^[35] dealing on basic liberties and freedoms protecting Nigerian women’s rights, the National Government among different endeavours, presented specific changes outfitted towards the security of the privileges of women. A portion of the changes heralded the endorsement of the Show for the End of all Types of Oppression to Ladies. For instance, Nigeria is a signatory to certain international and regional Conventions such as Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)^[36] in addition to its Protocol^[37], the Child’s Rights Act 2003 (the law made the Convention on the Rights of Children part of Nigerian statutes). Inclusive in the efforts to ensure women’s rights preservation is the Law prohibiting trafficking in persons^[38] and building of Centres for development of the female folk in every one of the States in the country^[39].

Again, similar legislative intervention brought about the country’s enactment of the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act 2015^[40]. Prior to its being passed into law, there was no national Law which extraordinarily deals with sexual intimidation and domestic abuse in Nigeria. The substance of the Act is autochthonous. It mirrors the real factors of savagery (especially with respect to women) in contemporary Nigerian culture. It also incorporates provisions based on Nigeria’s commitment to international human rights principles. For example, the VAPP Act^[41] contains laudable provisions against wife beating, forceful expelling from home, and mandatory economic dependency and the like. Ekhaton^[42] argued that the enactment of the Act is an instrument for social reform or social engineering in Nigeria. In effect, it is needful for extant laws to cogitate the changing truths in regard to the needs of society.

Though highly commendable, contemporarily, the applicability of the VAPP Act outside the FCT remains a question of legal debate. It is opined that for the VAPP Act to achieve the desired purpose, it requires by necessary implication the adoption and implementation in all the thirty-six States of the Federation. This will ensure that perpetrators are convicted most importantly and that the culture which permits and enhances the breach of women’s rights protection is eradicated.

(ii) Judicial Interventions

There have been judicial interventions upturning certain obnoxious customary practices in Nigeria. Suffice it to state that some Supreme Court decisions have in the recent past impacted positively on gender equality in the nation. Nigerian Courts are coming alive to activism by making pronouncements on the legality of some inequitable statutes against the womenfolk. In the same vein, Ngozi has maintained that courts have based on certain provisions of the Nigerian Constitution, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, and the repugnancy doctrine to declare a nullity some of the unfair practices against women in the country^[43]. Some of the recent decisions of the Supreme Court which relied on the Constitution and repugnance doctrine to hold certain prejudicial customs which are biased against Nigerian women void are brought into focus

here. For instance, In *Mojekwu v Iwuchukwu* [44], the Supreme Court continued with its conservative policy in support of discriminatory law rules of inheritance as provided in section 42 (1) of the Constitution [45].

There are similar provisions in the Nigerian Constitution which promote gender equality under the law.

Also in *Mrs Onyibor Anekwe & Anor v Mrs Maria Nweke* [46], the argument in that case was whether a widow was disinherited because she did not have a male child. The Supreme Court *per* Justice Nguta held *inter alia* that 'The Custom inherent in Anambra State which the Appellant claimed and depended on is barbaric and propels the Awka Community to the era of cave man. It is repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience and right to be abolished [47].' Again, in *Mrs Lois Chituru Ukeje & Anor v Mrs Gladys Ada Ukeje* [48], the Supreme Court relied on the non-discrimination/equality provisions of the Constitution as basis of its judgment. The Court took into consideration the issue of whether the Igbo Customary law and practice which deprives children born out of wedlock from sharing the proceeds of their father's estate is unconstitutional. The Court in its decision stated that regardless of the conditions of the birth of a female child, such a kid is qualified for a legacy from her late dad's bequest. Thusly, the standard law which disentitles a female child from participating in the sharing of her late father's bequest is contrary to the Constitution [49].

Challenges to Women's Rights Protection

(i) Culture and Patriarch

Culture deals with the behavioural pattern of life of a set of people which is generally conducive to them. Embedded in culture are such things as value system and beliefs of the people concerned. They are handed down, at times, orally from one generation to another. Culture is an epitome of the habitual modes of thought that makes up a particular society. In African culture, men believe that women are to be seen and not to be heard. Culture gave men patriarchal power and as a result, men from cradle use violence as a mechanism to establish hierarchical order and demand of patriarchal or male dominance in society. One of the consequences of this is that men internalize violence. In other words, it becomes a norm and part of man's nature to exhibit negative masculinity on women. Culture in effect accords men certain privileges which propel them to breach the rights of women. Piferrer postulated quoting Adiche, 'Culture does not make people, people make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture [50].' In line with this argument, people are not supposed to hold custom and tradition responsible for the deeds that dehumanize womanhood which they have to endure. Culture is incapable of doing anything standing alone. By virtue of its nature, culture is dynamic meaning that it is changeable and it can be altered at will or as a matter of option within its substructure. Stakeholders are enjoined to only uphold cultural practices that enhance human rights generally and women's rights protection in particular.

Patriarchy and culture are intertwined and basically are inseparable from each other since patriarchy is embedded in the culture of most societies [51]. Patriarchy signifying male domination stemming from the view of male superiority is assumed by tradition as natural. According to Nnadi quoting Charles E Corry, Patriarchy: 'is a type of social association

where the dad is the incomparable expert in the family, faction or clan and descent is figured in the male line with the children having a place with the dad's group or clan, a general public, local area, or nation in view of social association [52]. The effect of these traditional attitudes is that women are seen as subordinates to men and are given roles which constrain a woman's God given ability to exercise choices that would enable her redress the abuse. Nnadi [53] is of the view that culture alongside patriarchy and resembling it in some aspects, play a major role in violating women. Tony-Sampson associates with this opinion and maintains that culture and patriarchy, customary and religious practices in society place women in precarious and disadvantageous position as second class citizens while elevating the status of men to first class citizens. The erroneous assumption of male superiority over women deep-rooted in culture and patriarchy violate women and possess a serious challenge to women's human rights protection in Nigeria.

(ii) Illiteracy

Education is perceived as the crucial ground-breaking device and a considerable instrument for financial strengthening. Gender problems as well as socio-cultural credence and practices hinder the accessibility of basic education among others [54]. Absence of education whether formal or otherwise is a catalyst to the violation of human rights in society. An illiterate woman has limitations in all ramifications of life. In order to be able to address legal issues as well as having knowledge of her human rights, education is highly needed. Illiteracy paves way for poverty. A woman who has no budgetary power is financially handicapped and cannot pursue her case to court when her human rights are breached. Again, due to illiteracy, local or rural women are not aware of their rights and when they are, they do not place premium on what human rights can do for them because human rights let alone women's rights are foreign to culture and deeply challenge the notion of individual and community identity [55]. It is viewed that for there to be women's rights protection, women need to be educated. Education is the most essential tool of the appropriate change present for economic empowerment. An educated woman has the capacity to be independent and self-supporting financially and otherwise. Education equally assists in dealing with elementary health matters including associated health challenges such as HIV/AIDS which some violated women at times have to contend with. Education works with the creation of right decisions by ladies or if nothing else living by the outcomes of their decisions. It is additionally a way, through innovative work, to finding arrangements, to the issues and difficulties of infringement of women's privileges on the planet at large and Nigeria specifically. It is pertinent to state also that education and financial literacy for women ensure the elimination of dependency and provides more dignity-related options for women and children. It strengthens the elimination of gender inequalities. On the contrary, where women wallow in illiteracy which among others leads to abject poverty and ignorance as to their human rights, illiteracy then is a serious constraint to the rights protection of women.

(iii) Society

The conduct and reaction of society relegates women's rights and in fact womanhood to the background. Olofin opines that 'society accepts socio-cultural and traditional practices that are discriminatory, relegating and inimical to women's advancement' [56]. This has even been judicially

condemned as noted in the lead judgment of Niki Tobi JCA in the case of *Augustine Nwofor Mojekwu v Caroline Mgbafor Okechukwu Mojekwu* where he posed the following stimulating questions:

Is such a custom consistent with equity and fair play in an egalitarian society such as ours where the civilized society does not discriminate male against women? Day after day, month after month and year after year, we hear of and read about customs, which discriminate against womenfolk in this country. They are regarded as inferior to the menfolk. Why should it be so? ^[57]

Parochial perception of women and the resultant violation of women transcend society. Society, (Nigeria inclusive) sanctions violation such as wife beating or rape as a weapon of war. Violence against women is viewed as a normal way of life or as a norm by society. Nigerian societies are traditional societies with very high regard for tradition, culture, custom and women's total and unconditional subjection to their husbands. Under this circumstance, a woman is expected to make little or no contribution to issues outside her domestic responsibilities, and noncompliance to this rule meets with hard masculine resistance. Violation of women's rights is a household issue in Nigeria implicating at the least four in every five families. The indulgencies of society towards Nigerian women in general and Nigeria in particular are a hindrance to the protection of women's rights.

(iv) Poverty

Poverty is the deadliest scourge plaguing developing and underdeveloped countries and it, therefore, constitutes dangerous threats to global existence ^[58]. As at June 2018, Nigeria ranked the highest in extreme poverty ^[59] in the world and has had to live with a worsening poverty situation, especially, among rural communities. According to a past recent report by the World Poverty Clock in 2018, Nigeria has the most extreme poor people in the world. The report ^[60] then showed that 86.9 million Nigerians representing 50% of its estimated 180 million population lived in extreme poverty. Women's condition with respect to poverty is even worse. As stated by another Report ^[61], '70% of poor Nigerians consists of women. Of much concern is the fact that the majority of rural Nigerian women live below subsistence level'. The situation in regard to poverty in the nation has not changed. The most recent Report ^[62] on this issue maintains that Nigeria still maintains the position of Poverty Capital the globally.

It is considered that the effect of poverty on women generally especially indigent and rural women is far-reaching and cannot be over-emphasized. Poverty can be described as one of the wheels of progress of violating women. Nnadi suggests that 'the frustrations associated with poverty can be seen as aggravating aggression and violence against women.' ^[63] Tony-Sampson strongly aligns with this assertion.

The United Nations World Summit in September, 2005 overwhelmingly approved the MDGs and it was decided that all developing nations would provide elegant national strategies to realize the MDGs ^[64]. It is apposite therefore, to state that there is a direct nexus between women's human rights protection and the MDGs. The Millennium Development Goals Objectives are a progression of eight time-bound improvement objectives that look to resolve issues of destitution, instruction, uniformity, wellbeing and

the climate, to be accomplished constantly by 2015. They were concurred by the Global People group at the United Nations Millennium Summit, which took place in New York in September 2000 ^[65]. The eradication of abject poverty is the first Goal of the MDGs.

In society, Nigeria inclusive, the bulk of unemployed and unskilled people are women. In some communities women are completely dependent on the men as they are not allowed to secure any paying job to satisfy the men's desire or by virtue of cultural norm. In other communities, women being bread winners work so hard to meet the needs of the family and forget to save for the rainy day or do not have enough to save and poverty continues to increase. Poverty as seen from the above analysis is definitely a huge incursion to the protection of women's rights and encourages violation of women.

(v) Environmental Challenges

The Environment has been defined as: 'The physical and cultural spaces in which the human species live, reproduce and die. It consists of the water, the atmosphere, land and all living and non-living things that inhabit these spaces' ^[66]. Also in the case of *AG Lagos State v AGF & 35 Ors*, ^[67] Niki Tobi JSC on the meaning of Environment stated: 'Environment is the totality of physical, economic, cultural and social circumstances and facts which surround and affect the quality of peoples' lives, the surrounding conditions, influences or forces which influence or modify. The implication of the above definitions is that existence on the planet earth depends on the environment. Environmental degradation has been described as the deterioration of the environment via depletion of resources, global warming and green-house effect. It impacts on various aspects of human rights especially women's rights protection. Some of such rights are right to fulfilment of man's basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter, rights to development which includes right to sanitation facilities, housing and health, among others.

Environmental degradation further more poses serious challenges to humanity generally ^[68] (and women in particular). Environmental pollution such as flood renders women and children homeless. Fishing activity is affected because the rivers, seas and oceans are polluted by oil exploration and spill. When the environment is put in jeopardy whether by reason of man's activity or natural disaster, women are worse off ^[69]. More deplorable is the condition of rural women (farmers) who depend on the land for their means of livelihood. Environmental violation in all its ramifications leads to joblessness, hunger and poverty and insecurity of life of women and children as the most vulnerable group of society.

Environmental challenges impact negatively on women more than any other group in society. The challenges emanating from environmental degradation are incursions to the actualization of women's rights protection in Nigeria.

(vi) Conflict Situations

There exists a certain level of conflict situations in Nigeria ranging from cult clashes, militancy, and insurgency and so on. In such situations, women and children are the worst hit. Women do not start wars but they suffer most in conflict situations. As an illustration, people living in the Niger Delta in the South-South Zone of Nigeria in the recent past experienced some level of violation of women as a result of

cultists' activities. During cult clashes houses are burnt down rendering women and children homeless. Women are raped when they go to the farm by cultists. This hinders women from going to the farm to avoid being raped or kidnapped. In effect, women's right to earn their living is violated. This also has caused scarcity of food (for example garri) at one point in time or the other in the affected areas. Niger Delta Militants and their associates have bombed oil pipe lines on several occasions. This resulted to environmental pollution. For instance, once rivers and farm lands are polluted, fishes die and crops wither. Women who are farmers lost their source of livelihood. Sustainable development for women in particular is adversely affected. In IDP Camps women are raped and some others are forced into prostitution in order to buy food to sustain their lives and that of their children. The assertion that there is no safe haven for women in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized.

Prospects of Nigerian Women's Rights

In the light of their agitation for equality with the menfolk purely on the basis of their common humanity, it has been argued that Nigerian women possess one unambiguous and decisive advantage which is the fact that discrimination is not written into Nigeria's basic Law, her Constitution. Unequivocally, the Constitution ^[70] specifically provides against discrimination on the ground of sex ^[71].

With the exception of customary practices, prejudices and similar things, there are few statutory provisions discriminating between the sexes. To this effect, it will be logical to state that since the subsisting subjugation, inhuman traditional practices and prejudices have not been written into the country's laws (as is the situation), the prospects of Nigerian womanhood for equality or human rights is as good as won. Nigerian women have *de jure* been fully liberated. It is firmly believed that Nigerian Courts can and are indeed dealing with any instances of actual prejudice which lack legal backing and consequently *ultra vires* with the provisions of the Constitution and in effect invalid, wrong and unjust.

However, it is arguably the opinion of this write-up that discrimination against women in Nigeria having taken deep root in culture, custom, tradition and the like, cannot effectively receive a good fight ultimately with only legislation. It is pertinent to note that the dehumanizing practices as well as prejudices against Nigerian women are also based on superstition and lack of understanding. The panacea for superstition and ignorance is the education and knowledge including the consolation of a religion which believes in the genuine equality of all mankind. Importantly, women themselves need to set their minds free from the fetters of the discrimination and bondage of these prejudices which they have been subjected to from time immemorial and have resigned their fate to in order to achieve full emancipation.

The Constitution ^[72] gives Nigerian women the right to the dignity of their human person and the right not to be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment. These rights are sacrosanct, achievable and the womenfolk should utilize the relevant constitutional provisions to their favour in the pursuit of their human rights protection.

The prospects of Nigerian women's rights is very brilliant, however they need to deal with unconscious existing prejudice in regard to education, public and political life, credit facilities, health care, employment and labour *inter*

alia. Nigerian women still have much to do in these areas to enable them achieve equality with the malefolk. This is important in order to avail the country benefit from women's skills and intuitive wisdom. The fight for women's rights among others is to enable the nation gain from the kinetic energy released from and by the process of such liberation.

For any nation to do well on all sides, both the malefolk and the womenfolk should be recognized, politically, socially and economically inclusively involved. No one gender should be left out. According to the World Bank ^[73], the female percentage of total population in Nigeria was 49.33% in 2020. This fact should compel the country to recognize and make use of women's numerical strength, God given intuitive endowments and resourcefulness to the advantage of the nation.

Finally, this piece strongly holds that given the position of the Constitution ^[74] with respect to its non-discrimination provisions coupled with the awareness so far created locally and globally in regard to women's rights agitations and actualization, the future of women's rights in the country can only be better. Therefore, the emancipation of Nigerian women and the prospects of their rights are positive and bright. However, women have a major role to play towards the actualization of the rights of women in the nation.

Conclusion

Women issues in conjunction with their rights, privileges, liberties and preservation have become notorious both nationally and globally. A society that upholds human rights can actually be one that is highly committed to the defence of the natural rights of ladies and the development of the womenfolk. The factors identified and others not mentioned in this work constitute serious challenges to the safe keeping and realization of civil rights females in the nation's societies. To really uphold world standard for women's safety in the country, issues bothering on culture, illiteracy, societal perception, poverty, environmental challenges and conflict situations and the like need to be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

Recommendations

The identified challenges are critical and constitute affront to the well-being, natural endowment and rights of women as human beings. Therefore, to achieve the general safety of women and children in Nigeria, some recommendations are proffered. It is presumed that the adoption of the suggestions in this piece will greatly improve the condition of Nigerian women. The recommendations are:

1. Societies in the country should uphold only cultural practices that enhance the well-fare and security of women. Advocacy visits and campaigns by human rights activists and NGOs to stakeholders in this regard will be of help.
2. To encourage women education as to eradicate illiteracy among them, the Government should grant scholarship especially to indigent women up to university level. This will enhance their rights awareness and financial independence thereby reducing the level of poverty among women in the nation.
3. The Government should provide job opportunities for youths to forestall them engaging in activities which

are inimical to the protection of women and the human rights of people in the country.

4. Finally, the appropriate authorities should take all necessary steps to stop violation of the environment. This can be by legislation and real implementation of the laws or any other appropriate means of tracking down agents of environmental degradation. This is important to safeguard the lives of people now (especially women and children) and the generation unborn.

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