

The Women of Nigeria: Problems, Panacea and Prospects

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Historically, the role and status of women in Nigeria have continuously evolved.¹ In the pre-colonial period, women played quite paramount roles in the trade, social, political arena, they largely contributed to the household income via engaging in many economic activities like food processing, mat-weaving, pottery-making especially in Afikpo now Abia State, weaving, fish-drying (especially in the coastal areas of Calabar, Oron and the Niger Delta). Women increasing success in trade, availed them chieftaincy titles such as the *iyalode* titled amongst the Yoruba clan connoting being in the position of greatness, privilege and power,² but that is not to state that they didn't have challenges, even during colonialism, the active roles they played began to whittle down. Apart losing their economic status, political and administrative relevance; civilization amongst Nigerian people, indicated several unconsidered issues, which has been at the forefront of national and international affairs. Some of these issues includes violence against women, child marriage, the role of women in Politics, Education of the Girl Child amongst others.

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¹ T. Falola, 'The role of Nigerian women Encyclopedia Britannica' *Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.* November 20, 2007 <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/role-of-Nigerian-women-1360615>> (accessed 27th December 2016)

² S.E. Attoe, 'Women in the Development of Nigeria Since pre-colonial Times' <<http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/adv.asp?blurb=150#ixzz4U3ObefGv>> accessed 27th December 2016

It is based on this premise that this paper seeks to examine these issues faced by women in Nigeria, with an appraisal of the Panacea and Prospects.

2.0 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is defined as any act of “gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of acts such as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”³ Reports reveal “shockingly high” level of violence against women, Project Alert (2001), in a survey on violence against women conducted interviews with women working in the markets and other places of work and girls and young women in secondary schools and universities, in Lagos State, Nigeria. 64.4% of 45 women interviewed in the work place said they had been beaten by a partner (boyfriend or husband), 56.6% of 48 interviewed market woman admitted experiencing such violence,⁴ caused by the Patriarchy nature of the Nigerian society which allows the domination of women by men and therefore puts the men as the head of the family with the authority of determining the roles women play. The culture of silence amongst women remains a contributory factor, inadequate implementation of laws on gender violence.

³ United Nations General Assembly, 1993. A/RES/48/104 85th plenary meeting 20 December 1993

⁴ Ibid

3.0 CHILD MARRIAGE AND EDUCATION OF THE GIRL CHILD

This is basically marriage before the age of 18 years which is recurrent amongst women. In Nigeria, 43% of girls are married off before their 18th birthday. 17% are married before they turn 15. The prevalence of child marriage varies widely from one region to another, with figures as high as 76% in the North West region and as low as 10% in the South East.⁵ Poverty, poor educational attainment and strong social and religious traditions are drivers of child marriage in Nigeria. For many poor families, marrying off their daughter at an early age essentially is a strategy for economic survival; it means one less person to feed, clothe and educate.⁶ Early Education is a strong indicator of whether a girl will marry as a child. 82% of women with no education were married before 18, as opposed to 13% of women who had at least finished secondary education.⁷ Educating the girl child only tool with which a girl or a woman can empower herself and eventually her family and the immediate society. This can be achieved by ensuring that the education of women is a constitutional right in Nigeria like the practice adopted in India.

⁵ Child marriage around the world, <<http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/nigeria/>>accessed 22nd January 2017

⁶ Addressing Child Marriage, <<http://www.wharc-online.org/publications/wharcs-monthly-update/addressing-child-marriage/>>accessed 22nd January 2017

⁷ Child marriage around the world, n5

4.0 WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

In today's world where various countries strive for globalization, paying attention to the opportunities offered by the global market is very paramount. To do this, there is the need for countries to fight the ills of gender inequality which remains a cause. Where gender inequalities constitute barriers to women entering or participating fully in markets, economic growth and private sector development will be constrained with less investment, less competition, and lower productivity. Gender inequalities can also adversely affect the outcomes of trade and macroeconomic policy reforms and their ability to translate incentives into economic development.⁸ Nigeria still falls short of the desired result of giving males and females' equal opportunities and equal access to opportunities to advance socially, economically and politically,⁹ largely because of the lack of Investment in the human capital, health and education, of women and girls. The issue of job discrimination still exists, some employers assume that female employees are less dependable than male employees.¹⁰ It happens during the hiring process when men are hired instead of women with equal abilities and experience, can be in form of sexual harassment when a woman or man is not taken seriously and is regarded as a sex object, or in form of employment benefits such

⁸ Okoyeuzu, Chinwe, Obiamaka, Egbo, Onwumere, J.U.J, 'Shaping the Nigerian Economy: The Role of Women' AUDOE, Vol8, no4, pp.15-24 accessed 24th January 2017

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ L. Iberiyenari, 'Gender discrimination in the workplace: are women sufficiently protected?' <<http://www.thelawyerschronicle.com/gender-discrimination-in-the-workplace-are-women-sufficiently-protected/>>

as the amount of training or vacation a male or female employee receives.¹¹

5.0 WOMEN AND POLITICS

Over the years, the role of women in politics has been on the rise, before independence, a couple of women were political activists such as, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Mrs. Janet Mokelu and Ms. Young who were members of the Eastern House of Assembly. The late Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, though not a full-fledged politician, was a very strong force to reckon with in the politics of the Western Region. And Hajia Gambo Sawaba waged a fierce battle for the political and cultural emancipation of women in the North. One can say that women have always played viable political roles in Nigeria, yet there is inherently a pronounced level of under representation of women in politics when compared with their male counterparts.¹² This is often met with challenges they face like bias against women candidacy, highly competitive environment, inadequate funding for electioneering. For there to be meaningful development, a vantage position should still be accorded the women, as they constitute larger proportion of the population. In this regard, they should not be left out in the issues of decision making that bothers even on their lives as a people.¹³ It can be ensured that granting greater support to women to hold political positions.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² R.K. Gonyok

¹³ Ibid

6.0 WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

The gender inequality has brought about uneven development within the country. Reports show that “Nigerian women have about the worst representation of 5.9% in the national legislature when compared to most other African countries example Uganda (34.6%), South Africa (43.2%), Ethiopia (27.7%), Cameroon (20%), Niger (12.3%) and DR Congo (8.0%)”. The issue being that women in Nigeria face a lot of odds when they contest against men.¹⁴ These shortcomings had made the country strive to establish policies that will reduce gender inequality. Nigeria took a bold step in the year 2000 when it adopted and passed into Law National Policy on women guided by the Global Instrument on the Convention of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

7.0 PANACEA AND PROSPECTS

As established that the rate of violence on women is still very high, it is imperative that the state make the laws on women violence stiffer and ensure that there should be proper implementations of these laws. In doing this here is need to take into consideration the peculiar circumstances of women living under different economic, religious and cultural backgrounds.

¹⁴ Olurode L (2011). In the paper titled: State and political participation. Gender Analysis of Nigeria, 2011 Elections

Without such consideration, new laws and policies may not enhance access to justice and enforcement of rights of women.¹⁵

In addition, ensuring equal access of woman and man to important resources and reduce extreme poverty among women including ensuring gender equitable access to capital and medium large scale investment opportunities; Eliminate all discriminatory practices against the employment of women in the public and private sectors of the economy. The implementation of policies which allow women reconcile their private and professional life will go a long way in reducing the gender parity between men and women in the labour force. Policies and developments affecting the informal sector must have a gendered effect.¹⁶

To forestall this obnoxious practice of child marriage, there is a need for the government to codify provisions to protect girls against forced marriage in customary and Sharia law and to sensitize community judges in those systems, because of continued resistance to provisions against forced marriage in penal law. This will help women and girl attain a considerable educational feat. Every girl that receives an education is more likely to make education a priority for her children. It's a ripple effect of positive change in the community and country.

¹⁵ Itoro Eze-Anaba, 'Domestic Violence And Legal Reforms In Nigeria: Prospects And Challenges' <<http://law.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6857&context=expresso>>

¹⁶ A. Rahman, 'Nigeria In Focus; Women's Empowerment and The Link to Sustainable Development' JMSUL. Accessed January 26, 2017

8.0 CONCLUSION

Just from the inception of this focus on the Nigerian women, some very factors keep reoccurring as the challenge that women and girls face in the country. The most reoccurring includes low levels of education, inadequate governmental policy and legislation on women's rights, discriminatory practice against women. Having identified the problems, it becomes sacrosanct that all stakeholders within the country strive to ensure that the highlighted challenges are tackled by employing institutional frameworks, policy framework, paying attention to the potentials in the Nigerian women.