

GLOBAL TREND TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY: NIGERIA'S EXPERIENCE IN FOCUS

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Abstract

*This paper examines the struggle for gender equality in Nigeria. It observes that despite Nigeria's ratification of virtually all international instruments on the protection and promotion of gender rights and equality, she has failed to domesticate most of them. Consequently, this has slowed down the pace of women emancipation in Nigeria; it has also denied women rights activists in Nigeria a wider and stronger platform to agitate for the enforcement of women's rights. The paper further highlights and examines *inter-alia*, the galaxies of gender discriminatory laws that still exist in the pages of Nigerian statute books and the harmful cultural practices that have for decades impeded the rights of women in Nigeria. The paper also observes that the gender inequalities in the system have occasioned an intense marginalization and subjugation of Nigerian women to the background, in virtually every sphere of life; the paper recommends new strategies to be adopted by gender rights activists in combating these institutionalized discriminations. The strategies include; an urgent review of all gender discriminatory laws in Nigeria, sensitization of Nigerian women on their legal rights through intensified aggressive advocacy and enlightenment, establishment of more gender violation monitoring agencies in Nigeria. The sensitization of Nigerian law enforcement agents and judges on the need for a stricter enforcement of women's rights, immediate abolition by the Nigerian government of all harmful cultural practices that impede women's rights, an urgent domestication of all international Treaties, Nigeria has ratified, and enactment of more specific gender friendly based legislations. Finally, a case is made for more appointments of women to hold political offices. The paper further recommends that further researches should be channeled towards discovering the reasons for the apparent high level of complacency of Nigerian women to these persistent flagrant violations of their rights.*

Keywords : Nigeria, Gender Equality, CEDAW, Obnoxious Cultural Practices, Gender Discriminatory Laws International Treaties.

Introduction

Gender based discrimination is an all pervasive global problem which has occasioned intense gender inequality in many countries of the world. It existed from the dawn of civilization and has continued over centuries. However it shows up in different forms and manifestation in different countries and cultures¹. Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW) has defined the term "gender discrimination" as:

Any distinction ,exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of man and woman, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.²

Gender discrimination, has created wide gender gaps in many countries of the world, with very devastating social, economic and, health consequences on the members of the female gender, who have been intensely marginalized, and subjugated to the background. This discrimination not only breeds feminized poverty, but in recent times also exacerbates the feminization of HIV epidemic, as there is now strong linkage between gender discrimination and high susceptibility of women to HIV/AIDS epidemics.

The world, for the past few decades has witnessed a resurgent interest in feminist jurisprudence. This interest has culminated in the emergence of numerous global strategies geared towards women empowerment and emancipation. Examples of such strategies are; The Vienna Declaration Programme and Action; Nairobi Forward – looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women the ICPD Programme of Action; the Beijing Conference etc. This global feminist interest has also given birth to a catalogue of international and national instruments aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of women. The instruments in question include; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974); Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2000); African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (1986) etc.

These legal instruments unanimously affirm the fact that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights without any distinction of any kind, including distinction as to sex. They recognize the fact that discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and with the welfare of the family and of the society, prevents women's participation on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries and is an obstacle to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity³.

The CEDAW for instance, in Article 2, **inter-alia**, urged state parties to undertake⁴:

- a. to embody the principles of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions;
- b. to adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discriminations against women;
- c. to establish legal protection of the rights of women on equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunal and other public institutions, the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination.
- d. to refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation.
- e. to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discriminations against women by any person, organization or enterprise.
- f. to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;
- g. to repeal all national provisions which constitute discrimination against women.

Globally speaking, significant strides have been made by many countries towards advancing the cause of gender equality, in line with CEDAW demand. The responses from individual government have been encouraging⁵. The range of actions taken includes integrating gender equality concerns into national programmes and plan of action, including the creation of national structures to enhance women participation in development efforts. Many countries have also taken giant strides towards improving women access to education, employment, and productive resources; all these efforts target closing the hitherto observed wide yearning gender gaps in many countries of the world. A current global gender gap report from World Economic Forum⁶, reveals that Nordic countries; Ireland, Norway, Finland and Sweden rank 1st to 4th in gender gap closing rating by the forum. These Nordic countries have continued to demonstrate the greatest equality between men and women. The United States ranks 19, it has succeeded in closing its gender gap rising from 31st position to 19th position; while France has sunk to 46th ranking; and Switzerland 10th, Spain 11th, Germany 13th and UK 15th. Thus, Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum has observed that Nordic countries continue to lead the way in eliminating gender inequality. Gender Institutions and Development (GID) also reveal that persistent discrimination and repression are most marked in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa⁷

Nigeria, which is the focus of this paper, was a signatory to CEDAW. She ratified this all important legislation on women emancipation and empowerment over 20 years ago. The paper therefore aims at examining the extent Nigeria has complied with the above demands CEDAW made of state parties. It shall also examine the actual situation of women in Nigeria today, after many years of CEDAW ratification.

The Struggle for Gender Equality in Nigeria

The Actual Situation

Nigeria, after several decades of ratification of CEDAW, has failed to domesticate the international instrument as part of her municipal law. This regrettably has seriously slowed down the pace of women emancipation in Nigeria. Consequently, women who constitute half the total Nigerian population,⁸ still continue to suffer intense marginalization and relegation to the background. They are discriminated against in virtually all spheres of life in Nigeria, e.g. in the home front, in educational institutions, in working place, and in political appointments. The worrisome aspect of this discrimination is that it has persisted for so long that it is now so deeply rooted and institutionalized in Nigerian system that uprooting same would definitely pose an uphill task. Several factors have been advanced for these intense discriminations and marginalization. The factors include Nigerian Patriarchal system that is embedded in our cultural system. The Nigerian culture perceives and treats men as superior to women, this is well manifested in the “son preference syndrome” that is prevalent in Nigeria. Male Children in Nigeria often enjoy preferential treatment, like exemption from house chores; they enjoy unlimited right to education, while the girls are trafficked by some greedy parents for economic gains in the home. The culture equally disinherits wives and daughters. In the home front, women are subjected to all sorts of inhuman and degrading treatment. Our culture strictly restricts women to the stereotyped role of home keeping, child bearing and childrearing. She is to be seen and not heard. Olateru – Olagbegi and Afolabi⁹, have rightly observed, that this subordination of women by our culture knows no boundaries or barriers, and is not dependent on the “social, educational or economic status of the Nigerian women. Consequently, one finds that uneducated and poor women in the rural community suffer as much subordination as educated and rich women in the urban centre”. Another worrisome aspect of this cultural marginalization of women in Nigeria as observed earlier is its deep rooted nature in the Nigerian system. According to Olateru – Olagbegi and Afolabi¹⁰

Some of these beliefs have been practiced for so long that they are embedded in the societal perception almost as a legal norm. Such that the laws of the land and international instruments which protect the rights of women, are flagrantly infringed in the guise of these age long cultural and/or religious beliefs.

Women in Nigeria therefore suffer this discrimination from birth (maiden homes) to death (marital home). The paper shall presently identify and examine various gender discriminations in the Nigerian cultural, legal, political and economic systems.

Gender Inequality in the Nigerian Cultural System.

It is believed in many quarters that Nigeria's continued enforcement of Customary and Sharia laws have succeeded in fueling the relegation of women to the background. It is widely believed that most Customary laws in Nigeria, especially Igbo Customary law is "gender discriminatory and very illiberal towards women's rights".¹¹ Similarly, Sharia law, which is accorded the position of Customary law also, discriminates against women in many respects. The paper shall examine gender discrimination under Nigerian Customary and Sharia laws.

Gender Discrimination under Nigerian Customary Laws.

Nigeria is made up of many ethnic groups and each ethnic group, operates a peculiar customary law. Most of Nigerian customary laws, especially Igbo customary law are fraught with a legion of gender discriminatory practices. Igbo customary law which operates in South East Nigeria for instance, permits forced/ child marriage; wife/girl child disinheritance; wife chastisement; payment and refund of bride-price; wife inheritance; polygamy; denies women custodial and maintenance rights, encourages harmful widowhood practices and female genital mutilation (violence). All these cultural practices have one way or the other negatively impacted and slowed down the pace of women emancipation in Nigeria.

Firstly, a girl- child who is compulsorily married off at the age of 10 years by her parents for economic rewards to a man old enough to be her father, is not only emotionally and medically unprepared for marriage but is also economically ill-prepared for it, and often time such a child is permanently denied the right to education. Such a child-wife also lacks a say in the home and is totally and economically dependent on her husband in all respect.

Secondly, child /forced marriages expose the girl-child to medical hazards associated with early child birth, such as Vesico Vaginal Fistula and Recto Vaginal Fistula, (conditions of uncontrollable passage of urine).

Thirdly, the payment and refund of bride-price on the commencement of a customary law marriage and its dissolution respectively and wife inheritance by the brother of a widow's late husband, give the unpalatable impression that women are chattels that could be bought with money and such payments refunded in the event of divorce, no matter the length or duration of such a marriage. This is inequitable. Again, wife inheritance equally gives the impression that women under Igbo customary law can be inherited like property.

Fourthly, in the event of the death of a man, his widow is subjected to a legion of harmful widowhood practices which entails all manner of degrading treatment and dehumanizing acts. For instance, where she is being suspected by her husband's relatives of complicity in her ex-spouse's death, she is made to drink the water that was used to bathe the corpse of her

deceased husband, in order to be absolved. If she does not die after drinking the water, her innocence is established. She is equally forced to shave her hair, sleep beside her late husband's corpse. The widow's movement is also strictly restricted throughout the mourning period; these discriminatory cultural practices no doubt render her economically incapacitated to fend for her children. The discriminatory aspect of this practice is that men who lose their wives under Igbo customary law do not undergo these degrading dehumanizing and traumatic practices.

Fifthly, most Customary laws in Nigeria is patriarchal in nature and therefore does not recognize daughter/wife inheritance of father/husband's landed property. Land devolves on only the male lineage thereby disempowering women economically. This has been the lot of women in Nigeria, especially in the South –East, until the Nigerian Court of Appeal in the case of *Mojekwu. v. Ejikeme*¹² struck down this discriminatory system of inheritance, which disinherited the daughters of a deceased man from inheriting their father's landed property in preference of their uncle. The Nigerian Court of Appeal also held that such a custom was contrary to public policy and repugnant to natural justice equity and good conscience. The learned judge relied heavily on CEDAW as a touchstone in delivering this landmark decision.

Sixthly, most Nigerian customary laws encourage wife chastisement, and a great majority of Nigerian women have been socialized into accepting their inferior status and treatment. Consequently they perceive domestic violence as normal. In any case most women have no choice as they are economically dependent on men and could be thrown out if they resist any form of domestic violence. They are therefore subdued into suffering in silence. Furthermore, the girl-child is subjected to female genital mutilation by custom in order to curb her sexual appetite and forestall any wayward tendencies in her. This practice, which is accompanied with excruciating pain, persists in most cultures today, despite the fact that medical evidence has debunked the popularly held view that circumcised female are less promiscuous than uncircumcised females. Worse still, the heinous operation is carried out in an extremely crude manner and in unhygienic surroundings. The traditional herbalist uses unsterilized instruments, and more often than not, all the patients use the same instruments, thereby fueling the quick spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Some women even bleed to death, in the course of circumcision.

Finally, in the event of dissolution of a customary marriage, women are denied custodial and maintenance rights, as the products of customary marriages in Nigeria belong exclusively to the men. Furthermore, all Nigerian customary laws do not recognize the payment of maintenance to an ex-wife; in fact, she is expected by custom, to refund the bride price that was paid to her people on the commencement of the defunct marriage. This regrettably commercializes the divorce process and equally reduces a woman to the status of a defective product in commercial transactions. Thus, a woman leaves a defunct customary marriage empty-handedly.¹³

Sharia law

This law operates exclusively in the northern parts of Nigeria, and it is fraught with a lot of discrimination against women. Firstly, the Sharia law devalues a woman's testimony or evidence, and places it at par with the testimony of a minor. Secondly, the punishment meted out by the Sharia Courts in adultery cases discriminates against women in favour of men. The case of *Safiya Husseni*, is a good example of such discrimination. In this case, Safiya was sentenced to death by an upper Sharia Court in Sokoto state, Nigeria for committing adultery. (The judgment was however quashed on appeal). The shocking aspect of the judgment was that no co-adulterer was tried with her. This gave the wrong impression that adultery could be

committed by only one person. In practice, even where a woman names a co-adulterer, under the Sharia law, such a person named would only be required to swear to an oath of innocence. Once he swears this oath he is let off the hook, and goes scot free, leaving only the woman to face the music. Thus, the agitating question, why is this oath administered only on men? Besides, punishment by stoning women to death for adultery, and 100 lashes of cane for fornication under the Sharia law is a gendered violence as the excessive punishment more often than not targets only women.

Unfortunately, these discriminatory cultural practices have continued unabated despite the fact that Article II paragraph F of CEDAW enjoins state parties to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women.

Gender Inequality in the Legal System

The reality on the ground is that the Nigerian law which should be looked upon as the last hope of the down trodden, has turned out to be the very instrument of gender discrimination. The language of the Nigerian Constitution, for example, is regrettably masculine as the word “He” is consistently used in the Constitution to the exclusion of the word “She” where both genders are being referred to. Therefore, despite Nigeria’s ratification of CEDAW, galaxies of gender discriminatory laws still exist in the pages of Nigerian statutory books. The paper shall presently examine a few of such discriminatory laws.

(a) Section 6 of Nigerian Criminal Code (Legalization of Marital rape).

This section encourages gendered violence by legalizing spousal rape. Section 6 provides: “unlawful carnal knowledge means carnal connection which takes place otherwise than between husband and wife”. The legal implication of this section is that, under no circumstance can a man be found guilty of raping his wife. This discriminatory section which is still part- and- parcel of our law was unfortunately the 17th century view of Sir Matthew Hale of England. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights¹⁴ has since published a Declaration on the Elimination of violence against women and expressly stated that marital rape is a human rights violation. The global trend now is to the effect that about 104 countries of the world now prosecute spousal rape. Countries that have criminalized marital rape include Turkey, Mauritius, and Thailand¹⁵.

(b) Section 353 and 360 of the Criminal Code

These Sections have been roundly criticized for creating a disparity in the punishment applicable in cases of unlawful and indecent assaults respectively. The two sections provide lesser punishment where the victim of the assault is a female. For example, unlawful assault on male attracts a punishment of 3 years imprisonment, while the same unlawful assault on females attracts 2 years imprisonment. Furthermore, indecent assault on males is a felony, which attracts 3 years imprisonment and 2 years if the victim is a woman (a misdemeanor). The question may be asked, why this discrimination?

(c) Legalization of Wife Chastisement (Section 55 of the Penal Code)

This Section creates a fertile ground for violence against women. The section provides:

Nothing is an offence which does not amount to infliction of grievous hurt upon any person which is done by a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife, such husband or wife being subject to native law or custom in which such correction is recognized as lawful.

This section regrettably was given a judicial approval, in a very retrogressive judgment of the Nigerian Court of Appeal, in *Akinbuwa v Akinbuwa*¹⁶. The judgment, least to say, is outrageous and out of tune with global trend towards gender equality. Besides, the section in question fails to confer a corresponding right on the wife to chastise the husband. The irritating aspect of this gendered violence is that most women have grown with this and have accepted it as normal. They are therefore very complacent about enforcing their rights, besides the Nigerian police fail to recognize wife chastisement as human rights violation; they often wave its aside as “family issue” which should be handled privately.

(d) Sections 55, 56, 57 of Nigerian Labour Act

These sections in a nutshell empower the Minister of Labour to make regulations that prohibit women from undertaking certain jobs. The sections are discriminatory to the extent that they limit women’s access to work yet the International Equal Remuneration Convention of 1951 calls for equal job opportunities for men and women.

(e) Regulations 121 – 127 of the Police Act

The Nigerian Police Act is yet another discriminatory Act as Regulations 121 – 127 discriminate against women on the basis of their gender. Regulation 124 for instance, mandatorily demands every police woman desirous of marrying, to first apply to the Commissioner of Police of the state she is serving, requesting a permission to marry. She is to also furnish her would-be spouse’s particulars. Permission would only be granted, if the Commissioner is satisfied that the would be spouse is a man of good character, and the police officer must have, in addition served, the Police for a period not less than 3 years. Ironically, no such requirement is imposed on her male counterpart who wishes to marry. Furthermore, Regulation 127 provides that unmarried Police woman who becomes pregnant shall be discharged from the Force. These regulations is clearly oppressive and discriminatory¹⁷.

(f) Taxation Law

The Nigerian Tax Law operates under the assumption that a man is the “bread winner” of the family and fends for many dependants, hence only married men enjoy tax exemption, this law however fails to take cognizance of the fact that there are also single mothers with dependants, and as such ought to enjoy similar tax exemptions. This unequal taxation offends Article 7 of the ICESCR and Article 2 (1) of the CEDAW which guarantees equal pay for equal work, as well as equal treatment, for both sexes.

Political Marginalization of Women in Nigeria

Nigerian women have encountered numerous problems, while venturing into politics. They have experienced a large scale of discriminations from the men folk, both in voting for candidates, and in allocation of political offices¹⁸. Contrary to Article 3 CEDAW, they are denied equal opportunities with their male counterparts in the formulation of legal and policy framework for the nation, despite the fact that they constitute half of the Nigerian population.

Afolabi – Akiyode A,¹⁹ has rightly observed that the exclusion of women in governance and decision making in Nigeria, knows no bounds. She has further stated:

Women have been relegated to the background in issues of development....The reality of our politics and political arrangement in Nigeria has excluded much of female legitimacy resulting in women’s political powerlessness and

low participation in power and decision making. It is an enthronement of male agenda over the agenda based on equality of opportunities for both female and male.

The former Nigerian President ,Olusegun Obasanjo, in line with his political campaign promises, ensured that 15 percent of appointment to public offices at Federal level were reserved for women. Much as it is conceded that was a step in the right direction, the appointment however still falls short of global expectation, and it is still a far cry from 35per cent recommendation in the Beijing Declaration.

Nigerian women have however continued to gain in the Nigerian 2007 April election, where a total of 93 women emerged winners: Six Deputy Governors, 9 Senators, 27 National Representatives, and 52 in various State Houses of Assembly. There were also significant increases in the numerical strength of women holding cabinet and ministerial positions. The 2007 election in question also saw Nigeria receive its first female speaker of the House, Honourable Etteh, Patricia Olubunmi. The late President Yar'Adua led administration also placed seven women into exalted offices²⁰. Much as it is conceded that these recent developments are laudable, they still lag behind the 35 per cent recommendation of Beijing Conference.

Gender Inequality in the Workplace

One of the most striking global phenomena of recent times has been the increasing proportion of women in the labour force, thereby enabling women in many regions to use their potentials more in the labour market and achieve economic independence. The right of women to work, without any form of discrimination, is recognized and guaranteed by many international and national instruments, like Article 2 of CEDAW, Section 18 (3) African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights; Article 7 of ICESCR, ILO Equal Remuneration Convention of 1951 Discrimination Convention (Employment and Occupation) 1958 (NO111), Workers, with Family Responsibilities Convention 1981 (No 156) and Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No 183), and Section 42 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution. These legislations demand the elimination of gender inequality in the workplace, in the choice of profession, in employment opportunity, and in the right to promotion, in equal remuneration, and job security. Despite these legislations, for decades, gender-based discriminations in the Nigerian labour market persist practically everywhere, and at all levels. The higher the position in an organization or company the more glaring is the gender gap. The reality in Nigeria today is that legal, cultural and social obstacles still impede the right of women to work.

Prior to now, the traditional and social practices as well as role stereotypes confined women to the home as house wives and children bearers, hence, they were largely economically dependent on their husband, and by implication subservient to them. Currently, the Nigerian banking sector, does not hesitate in handing out sack letters to their married female staff who get pregnant in quick succession. Again, most lucrative and sensitive posts in virtually all establishments are often put beyond the reach of women and exclusively reserved for men. While the few women who are lucky to acquire jobs are constantly victims of sexual harassment, and failure on their part to succumb to these inordinate sexual demands from their bosses, often earns them sack letter. Furthermore, as a result of the prevalent "Son Preference" syndrome in Nigeria, the girl-child often falls victim of child trafficking (for cheap labour and prostitution) by her parents, for financial gains while the boys are kept back. There is no gainsaying the fact that economic emancipation of women is crucial in the struggle for gender equality as an economically dependent house wife or daughter lacks the resources that will enable her to agitate for her rights. International Labour Organization

(ILO) Equal Remuneration Convention of 1951 calls on governments to promote and ensure “the application of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value”. So far, 161 countries, including Nigeria have ratified this Convention; however there is the need to improve on its enforcement. Recently on 21st September 2010, The European Commission formulated its new strategy towards gender equality targeting increasing women’s presence at the labour market, and reducing the gap of equal pay.

Way forward

From the foregoing discourse, it is quite glaring that while significant strides have been made in many countries of the world to bridge gender gaps, and advance gender equality, in compliance with the demands of international instruments on women’s right, most countries like Nigeria are still lagging behind.

The need to combat all gender inequalities in every country of the world is extremely imperative in view of the numerous devastating consequences gender discrimination has occasioned on women. For instance, the 1993 World Development Report estimated that world-wide, “violence against women is a more serious cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age than cancer, and a greater cause of ill-health than traffic accidents and malaria combined”. Domestic violence also deprives women of bodily integrity by “eliminating their ability not to consent to sex, negotiate safer sex and determine the number and spacing of their children²¹. Furthermore, the threat of eviction and abandonment compels women against their wish to remain in abusive relationships. More recently, international attention has focused on the driving force of structural inequalities that infringe upon women’s social and economic rights making them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Therefore it is evident that gender discrimination and inequality, as observed earlier have not only occasioned feminized poverty but have also ushered in feminization of the HIV epidemic. In January 2002, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan²², announced that for the first time, women represented half of positive individuals world-wide and more than half in Sub-Saharan Africa. He attributed this awesome development to “evasive gender inequality”. In fact, there is now an urgent call to adopt Human rights and gender based frameworks for both international discourse and the global responses to HIV/AIDS.

From the foregoing it is quite glaring that a change is imminent in Nigeria. The UN millennium goal has re-affirmed gender equality and women empowerment as development goals in themselves. It has underlined their importance as a means to achieve all of other MDGS²³. The next question is, where do we begin and how do we start combating this gendered inequality in Nigeria, and indeed in the whole world? It is believed that reducing gender disparities may not be an easy task; however it is feasible with coherent, sensitive and practical strategies. This paper therefore proposes the following recommendations as a way forward.

Recommendations

1. Domestication of CEDAW

Nigerian government should, as a matter of urgency, domesticate CEDAW and all other international instruments on women’s rights which she has ratified. The non-discrimination provision of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution is inadequate. The Domestication of these international instruments is imperative in view of the fact that Section 12 of the Nigerian constitution has expressly rendered these international instruments non-justiciable, except they are domesticated as part of Nigerian municipal law. The failure of the Nigerian government to domesticate such an all important legislation as CEDAW, till date, is regrettable and shows lack of serious commitment on the part of the Nigerian government to eliminate gender inequality in

the system. Domestication of CEDAW and all other international instruments on gender rights will afford women activists in Nigeria stronger and wider platform to agitate for women's rights.

2. An urgent Review of all Gender Discriminatory Laws in Nigeria

Nigerian government should endeavour to review all gender discriminatory laws that still exist in the pages of our statute books in order to demonstrate her total commitment to eradicate gender inequality in Nigeria. Law is an instrument of social change and social justice, and not an instrument of perpetration of injustice. Recently, the Nigeria Minister for Health disclosed that the Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, has in a milestone decision approved the admittance of female cadet as regular combatant, prior to now all female intakes into the Nigerian armed forces had been limited to the non combatant troops thereby limiting their career plans irrespective of their competence and skills. This is certainly a right step in the right direction; every person in Nigeria irrespective of the gender should be given equal opportunity to excel in his or her chosen field.

3. Uprooting of all Obnoxious Traditional Practices that Impede the Rights of Women

The Nigerian government should collaborate with traditional rulers in Nigeria and other stakeholders to ensure that all harmful and traditional practices which target only women, are uprooted. This could be advanced through dialoguing with the traditional rulers who are the custodians of our culture; they should be made to outlaw all oppressive customary practices in their domain.

4. Economic Empowerment of Women

It is high time Nigerian government increased women's presence at the labour market. She should embark on initiatives to get more women into top jobs in economic decision making. Furthermore, female entrepreneurship and self employment should be promoted by making loans on lenient terms available to women. Economic empowerment of women is very imperative, if any headway is to be made in this struggle for gender equality. An economically dependent woman is powerless and voiceless, and cannot assert her rights, not to talk of seeking legal redress in courts.

5. Educational Empowerment of Women

Compulsory girl-child education is a useful strategy that should be adopted to bridge gender gaps in Nigeria. Present Nigerian laws against trafficking of young girls as domestic servants and prostitutes should be strictly enforced. Education of a girl-child, in the long run, would equip her future participation in key decision making in the government and also enable her influence gender friendly policies.

6. More Political Appointment for Women

Nigerian government is called upon to beef up her political appointive positions for women. The present appointments still fall short of the international expectation, that 35 per cent of all political appointment should be reserved for women. The need for integration of women into the mainstream of decision making in government can never be over-emphasized.

7. Overhauling of Social Institutions

It is evident that inequalities are often rooted in social institutions. Nigerian government should therefore endeavour to overhaul and reform all institutional frameworks that limit the development of women's potentials and skills. A leaf should be borrowed from her brother country Tunisia, where such efforts are paying-off. In Tunisia today, 30 - 50% of judges, physicians and school teachers are now women. Similarly in India, women have risen to the highest levels of politics and business in recent times.

8. Engaging men in all Reform Efforts

It is recommended that the fight against gender discrimination needs to co-opt men and boys. Hitherto, there has been heavy focus on women's needs, while overlooking the fact that societies based on persistent discrimination is highly advantageous to men and therefore they may be unwilling to make sacrifices in favour of women. It is therefore recommended that where necessary, men should be involved in the reform process and financial compensation made available to them in deserving cases; like in reforming discriminatory inheritance laws. This type of reform is now being carried out in Kenya²³.

9. Enactment of Gender Based Specific Law

It is apparent from this discourse that there is every need to enact gender specific laws to curb gender violence. Our present laws on gender issues have been criticized as grossly inadequate. For instance, the manner in which rape trials are conducted in Nigeria, coupled with the high degree of quantum of evidence required to secure convictions, exposes the already traumatized women/girls sexual victims to indignity, making it men's trial but a women's tribulation. Furthermore, the corroborative requirement of Nigerian Evidence Law for Rape has further heightened the problem of securing convictions for rape. A Gender-based specific law on rampant gendered violence in Nigeria is long overdue.

10. Re-Orientation of the Nigerian Police.

Nigerian law enforcement agents should be sensitized on human right implications of gendered violence and discrimination. The government should make them more sensitive to gender rights violation complaints. They should stop trivializing such matters as "family issues". More workshops should be organized for them, in order to address the issue of observed yearning gaps in Nigerian law enforcement system, in relation to gender discrimination.

11. More Aggressive Advocacy by Gender Rights Activists, Lawyers and Judges.

It has been observed that most Nigerian women are very complacent on this issue of gender rights violation. They have been socialized from infancy into believing that it is cultural, and therefore normal. There is therefore, every need to extend advocacy and enlightenment programmes on gender rights violation to the grassroots. Rural women need to be sensitized on their right and the redress available to them in the law courts.

12. The Role of the Media.

The government media should devise more effective awareness raising programmes especially in the grassroots. The media should henceforth desist from portraying women in a negative and degrading manner as "sex objects".

13. Establishment of more Internet Portals to Foster Dialogue for the Promotion of Gender Equality.

This portal will create an avenue of reaching out to the public or the internet, by fostering a dialogue on the importance of gender equality. Such websites, as Wiki gender, will provide an open forum to share and exchange information on the situation of women and will also encourage frank discussions on the factors that impede women's social, political and economic empowerment. It is believed that such forum will reveal people's personal experiences on gender rights violation, and will definitely help to deal with "stubborn social attitudes and mind sets, while enabling policy – makers to tailor their strategies to the specific situation in a country or community"²⁴.

14 **Establishment of More Gender Violation Monitoring Agencies.**

It is advocated that more gender monitoring agencies be established by the Nigerian Government, especially at the grassroots level for an effective monitoring and reporting of gender rights violations against the female genders in Nigeria.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discourse, it is quite glaring that gender equality implies equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for women and men, girls and boys in all spheres of life. It equally implies that both men and women are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes or prejudices about gender roles on the characteristics of women and men. It is heart warming that Millennium 2000 Declaration, has reaffirmed gender equality and women empowerment as development goals themselves and has underlined the importance of women empowerment as a means of achieving all other (MDGS)²⁵. The Millennium Declaration also calls on States to “promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective way to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable”. Furthermore, Kofi Annan, has in 2006, warned that it is impossible to realize our goals while discriminating against half of the human race.

Nigeria is therefore called upon to be part of global trend towards gender equality. She should demonstrate more sensitivity towards the plight of Nigerian women by implementing most, if not all, the recommendations in this paper. Further researches should however be channeled towards discovering the reasons why most Nigerian women have exhibited and continue to exhibit high level of complacency even in the face of flagrant and persistent violation of their constitutionally guaranteed rights.

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