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RESOLVING THE CONFLICT OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT.

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ABSTRACT
The enthronement of social justice, peace and sustainable development for all is at the core of the United Nations global mandate towards all men and all nations. Unfortunately the rising trend of gender inequality in Africa has continued to undermine this goal in the continent. Entrenchment of development and sustainable peace in modern nation states in Africa have continued to be grossly undermined by the multiplier effects of ethnicity and gender inequality challenges in Africa. Domination and oppression are universal phenomena; however their global capital appears to be in Africa most particularly when one considers the level of ethnic conflicts and gender inequality in the sub region. It is against this backdrop that this work seeks to examine the gender inequality challenges in Nigeria with a view to charting the way forward. The work involves a survey approach and would use content analyses technique in the interpretation of collected data. The work observed that gender inequality challenges in Nigeria are rooted in our cultural aberrations that entrench injustice against women as a treasured heritage and belief system. It therefore called for promotion of a just and open society, sanctioning and uprooting of traditions, culture and belief systems and values that institutionalize injustices and inequality against women as well as the promotion of cultural revival and crusade that strive to enthrone the culture of equity, truth and globally best practices in nation building.

Key words: Gender Inequality, Peace, Development, Social Justice, Nigeria.

1.0 Introduction
Commenting on the grief and anguish of the women of our times Uchem (2006) stated that the groans of women should be heard and attended to through concrete actions for change by the followers of Christ in Nigeria. The call she noted is predicated on the fact that the Church has been described as sacrament or hallmark of human solidarity. *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) describes the Church in Africa as the family of God. Moreover she posits that there are innumerable examples of manifestations of injustices against women but the root cause relates to the fact that whereas negativity is attached to women positivism accrues to the men –folk both in the church and in the society. It is against this backdrop that she avers that gender inequality challenges in Nigeria are sociological problems that are driven by perception dynamics. A faulty perception that accords women less value than men invariably fosters a tradition that devalues women's work, contributions, opinions, presence and achievements. What this means is that the challenges of gender inequality that is expressed in various forms of gender inequality against women must not be left as women problems alone.

Moving into adulthood, women generally face specific development challenges that are social and economic in nature and are rooted in cultural and political underpinnings. National Planning Commission Report (2001) was pointed in its submission when they stated that historically women's progression in

society and especially in Nigeria has been significantly curtailed by the traditional burden of birth rates. This they note is predicated on the cultural ethos that the basic role of a women ends in being a child bearer, child raiser and home maker. Even though the above trend is fast paving way to modernism such that there is a gradual downward trend in the fertility rates and increasing economic capacity of women arising from the increasing influence of urbanization which has pushed many women into labour force, Nigerian women ,like there counterpart the world over and especially in developing countries are exposed to all kinds discriminations. Babalola (2014) corroborates the above submission when he posits that gender inequality in Nigeria subsists and manifests in various ways such as subordination of the women to their male counterparts and confining of women to home makers. Furthermore he opines that the above inequality is predicated on differences on cultural and ideological belief systems. Equally Ghazal i(2017) in his contribution states that Nigeria is a male dominated society where women are held in subjugation whether they are rich or poor, urban or rural, educated or uneducated. The result he notes is that women are held in unending oppression and discrimination.

Girl child labour according to Kazeem (2012) is another prevalent gender inequality challenge in contemporary Nigeria society especially in Northern Nigeria. Girl child labour embraces the use of girls for various forms of cheap labour such as maids, shop helps and street hawkers as well as sex hawking. Child marriage in Nigeria according to *Wikipedia online* has been ranked as occupying the 11th highest position in the world. Besides it reports that as at 2017 the country had 43% of her girls under the age of 18 married while 18.17% of the girl child populations under 15 years of age were already married. Moreover it states that the situation is most pathetic in Northeast and Northwest Nigeria where nearly 3 out of every 4 girls are married before becoming 18 years- old. Child marriage therefore is a contemporary problem undermining the young female generation from accessing full development of their human potential before embracing the very demanding role of marital life. The result is that they grow up denied of acquiring the fundamental educational, vocational, social, economic and spiritual backbone needed to cope with the stressful adult and marital of life. The above challenge it notes is compounded by the fact that the Nigerian Constitution does not establish a minimum age of marriage and even The Child Right Act which was passed in 2003 that specified 18years-old as the age of marriage unfortunately many states are yet to implement the above Act in Nigeria. The high spate of women's plight in many African nations no doubt calls for serious concern.

Uchem (2006) while writing to underscore the need for the evolution of a world devoid of gender inequality cited Pope John Paul II apology to the women of the world as stated i*nter alia:*

> Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged …they have been often relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude…and if objective blame …has belonged not just to a few members of church, for this I am truly sorry.(Pope John Paul II , Letter to women no. 3).

The foregoing no doubt unveils the unimaginable gravity of the violation of women the world over in this contemporary times and the need for a paradigmatic shift by both the church and the society towards evolving a better world that accords women their right of place. Gender inequality is a global concept that is prevalent in many areas of life including education, employment, medical care, law and violence. There are overt examples of inequality such as large discrepancy in pay between man and woman and more examples of inequality such as different interview questions. It is against this backdrop that this work seeks to examine the rising trend of gender inequality in Nigeria and the need for an agenda of action by the church and the government.

2.0 Conceptual Definitions

2.1 Gender: It is defined by the Chambers Dictionary as a distinction of words answering to sex; the quality of being male or female. Moreover Nnamani (2019:159) defines the word not as male and female sexes but

as the role or responsibility that a given society assigns to both sexes. Besides, while citing the World Health Organization she defines gender as the term used to describe the various characteristics, roles, and responsibilities that are socially constructed for men and women, boys and girls by a given society. Equally she states that the social structure of society plays a great part in gender role designation as social structure differs from people to people. Moreover it defines gender as relating to socio-cultural categorization that divides people into male and female with each having a distinguished dressing code, roles, stereotypes, etc. Gender therefore relates to the societal differential that structuralizes the places or areas of influence and authority of the male and female folk as well as their identity pattern within the context of a cultural or a social network. It is the parameter that different societies use to distinguish men and women in terms of role and relevance in both their private and public space of life.

2.2 Inequality: Inequality is defined by Chambers Dictionary as lack of equality; disparity; difference; unevenness or dissimilarity. An *English Online Dictionary* defines the term as an unfair state. In addition it notes that the term relates to a mathematical statement that upholds the view that of two entities one is specifically less than (or greater than) than another. Inequality from the above context relates to the principle of inferiorization or superiorization of two objects with respect to each other in this case the male and the female folk. Inequality that reduces the female folk as inferior humanity in African nations in general and in Nigeria in particular is the major concern of this study. Gender inequality from the foregoing refers to the various dehumanizing treatments, violations, discriminations and abuses meted on women in the name of religious, economic, social, political as well as cultural traditions and beliefs.

2.3 Peace: Peace is defined by Miller (2006) as the political condition which makes justice possible. Peace from the above context has to do with the mobilization of the coercive instrument of government, the military establishment, for the entrenchment of public order and harmony. Besides it relates to the mobilization of governmental and non -governmental institutions for the enthronement of equity and justice for all so that no member of the society is placed at a disadvantage or discriminated against because of his or her age, sex, ethnicity, economic, political, or any other status. Unfortunately in Nigeria today most of her social, political, educational, economic and cultural institutions are manipulated as instrument of domination and subjugation of one group over another. Simply put the nation is run through institutions that condones and perpetuate all kinds of political, religious, tribal, gender, and economic dichotomy. The result is that the center which is peace cannot hold as the nation has continued to be submerged in self-inflicted chaotic polity. Politically Peace therefore refers to the state of social or public order rooted in the blending of instrument of coercion and public institutional framework that promotes equality of all before the law.

Aja (2007) is in agreement to the above view when he posits that the term peace is advanced when the political apparatus or players do not exploit force or imposition to gain personal advantage. According to him when political leadership operates through a culture of insensitivity to the yearnings of her citizenry they foster a negation of peace, a negation of order and stability which invariably becomes a breeding ground for all kinds of social injustice, oppression and underdevelopment.

Theologically peace is defined from the context of Christian religion as a person as well as principle of living. According to the Holy Book the Lord Jesus Christ is described as the Prince of Peace as well as *Jehovah Shalom* (The Lord our Peace) (Isaiah 9:6, Judges 6:24).The word Shalom is a Hebrew for peace meaning wholeness. Peace from Jewish cosmology therefore carries the idea of completeness, wholeness. By implication the term relates to soundness which embraces physical, mental, emotional, social, economic and spiritual wellbeing.

Thus when God charged Israel to allow peace to flow like a river He was calling the nation to promote united nation that drives on the wheel of truth, mercy, righteousness, equity, goodness. (Micah3: 5, 9-

12).From the foregoing peace has to do with the zeroing out of all forms of inequalities that dehumanizes the humanity of all shades including gender inequality.

2.4 Development: Inmpey (2019:103) states that development is not limited to economics discipline but also embraces several areas of human endeavour. According to him while citing Todaro (1989) the term refers to the improvement of incomes and outputs as well as radical changes in the institutional, social, and administrative structure. Put simply he defines same as the modernization of society or the conversion of a peasant society to an industrial society. Amunnadi (2016:136) defines development as the concept which relates to the following ideas: reduction of social indices of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Development therefore implies the flourishing of the economic capacity of a society as well as the entrenchment of socio –political and cultural institutions and values that sustain egalitarian society. Development as a concept embraces the building of synergy in the network of economic, political, economic, technological, social, cultural, spiritual, and religious levels of personal, interpersonal, groups, and inter-groups, national and international relationships with a view to fostering stability, peace and good governance

3.0 Theoretical Framework

There are several theories that have been advanced to support gender inequality. One of them is inequality theory. According to Lindsay (2007) as cited in *Lumen learning online* inequality theory relates to the differences inherent in nature through biological differences which cuts across all races and culture irrespective of their being developed or underdeveloped as well as the social constructions or distinctions assigned to sexes by different societies based on their political, social, economic ,cultural and religious background. Furthermore he posits that while the natural differences of the male and the female relates to the differences in sexes, the differences created by society races, culture and politics has to do with to gender inequality. Sexes are divinely ascribed label for distinguishing humanity while gender is the socially imposed identity meant to perpetuate a subjugated women-folk by the male folk. The former he wrote are biological distinctions created in nature as irreversible difference which no matter the clamour by feminist cannot be reversed.

However he noted that culture that shape these inequality are learned and therefore can change with time, within and between cultures. This means that gender inequality are not permanently fixated but operates within a dynamics of social and cultural change. This is corroborated by Banque and Warren (1990:90) who holds that men of yesterday and today think and act differently and achieve differently.

Farrington and Cherlok (1993) posit that conflict theory is another bases for explaining gender inequality today. They held that according to conflict social problem to which gender inequality is a microcosm are created when dominant groups exploit or oppress subordinate groups. Thus they submit because men occupy positions in the society. It is difficult for women to be above men as the dominant group members create the rules for success and opportunities in society. What this means is that gender inequality is a product of cosmic conflict which has pitched humanity against one another in their unending quest for dominance and significance. This work shall be adopting both theories as the background for paving a way for understanding of the context and study and proposing a possible way ahead.

4.0 The Upsurge of Gender Inequality in Nigeria

4.1 Women and education : According to Makama (2013) while citing CEC report (2007) Nigeria educational facilities are generally believed to be grossly inadequate with access to women and girl child highly limited. This was corroborated by United Nations Human Development report (2005) which not only classified Nigeria as an educationally disadvantaged nation in terms of access to quality education but also stated that female adult literacy from the age of 15 and above was 59.4% a figure which is noted was 15% lower than that of the male folks. Moreover it submitted that combined gross enrolment of female in

primary, secondary and tertiary institutions was 57% while that of the male was 71%. Ojo (2002) thus affirms that the presence of great inequality or gap between the men and women population with reference to access to education is a sad development which he notes unfortunately limits the access of women to certain socio-economic activities. Makama (2013) is in agreement to the above position when he states that reduced access of women to education is grossly undermining their access to the formal sector. According to him the social pressure such as early marriage, preference of male education to their female, religious inhibitions that confines women to the home are some factors reducing women access to education which is the ground norm upon which lasting development rests upon. Educational gap that undermines the place of women in our country is the reason behind high level of women population in petty trading, peasant farming and unskilled businesses.

4.2 Domestic Violence: Domestic violence against women and girls is another example of gender inequality challenges in Nigeria. Sibani & Bienose-Osagiede (2018:128) states that though domestic abuses or violence can be described as parental discipline taken too far it is most commonly perpetrated by foster parents, half-mothers and fathers, uncles, aunts and others who find themselves serving as custodian of child. According to them this takes the forms of excessive beating, locking up and locking out especially in the night, striping the child naked amongst others. Equally domestic violence takes form of wicked act which involves the reduction of house wives as punching bags by their husbands on any slight provocation. Uchem(2004) was in agreement to the above submission when she posits that a priest some time ago narrated a story about a woman who wept unceasingly during the baptism of her baby on account of her husband who after 5 years of marriage turned her into a punching sand bag because she was only giving birth to female children. Furthermore she notes that the story became more pathetic when the embittered wife submitted that her husband's beating could not stop even when she became pregnant but rather become worse. However she reported that her ordeal eventually stopped when she gave birth to a male child. The above story no doubt is only a tip of the iceberg of what African women are vulnerable especially in married life.

4.3 Sexual Abuse: Sexual violence has assumed a worrisome trend in Nigeria today. The situation becomes more disturbing as African culture holds sex as a sacred concept that should be discussed only in secret. Consequently those trapped in it often find it very difficult to discuss their problems in the open. Sexual abuse according to Gustavo (2017) embraces the carnal knowledge of teachers over their pupils, doctors over their patients and fathers over their daughters, uncles over their nieces and family friends over their friends daughters. It is therefore the act of unethically taking sexual advantage of female folk by virtue of having parental, custodian, professional, physical or any form of power over them. While few parents allow their female daughters to be abused sexually because of selfish economic interest as well as their unguided illicit sexual behaviour most parents are often ignorant of how other members of the society abuse their daughters sexually outside their consent. Sabina(2018) puts the above view pointedly when he states that many parents whose children are abused sexually would rather heap blames on their naïve children than challenge the society or the individual who unleash these evil on them. It is against this backdrop that he contends that African Church should shift her focus from the wild goose chase of resolving global racial discriminations matters to local but devastating problems of sexual abuses in our nation. This is because though they are little issues yet do not they demand the complex political maneuvers of engaging our white colonial masters. Rather they only requires an overhaul the of cultural orientation of our fathers, brothers, , uncles, aunts and the community as a whole who aid and albeit these acts.

4.4 Economic Inequality: Despite years of economic growth Nigeria according to Akinwotu (2017) has continued to witness a huge increase in the people living in poverty. According to him economic inequality is one of the major factors driving the culture of increasing coast of poverty in Nigeria. Unfortunately he

stated that in spite of the above observation that economic inequality is the major threat to the fight against poverty, corruption, violent conflict and underdevelopment in the country it has the remained the least talked about challenges. It is against this backdrop that this work seeks to provoke an urgent concern that will give birth to an agenda of action by both the Church and the society with a view to charting the way forward. Nmah (2003) posits that Nigerian women are grossly marginalized economically as they are not only subjected to discriminatory laws over land ownership, they are equally in most cases pushed to poverty line through undervaluation and underpayment of their contribution in the world of work. What this means is that women-folk dominate occupation that are placed at the lower rungs of economic power while men dominate highly lucrative jobs. *Https//:inequality.org/gender-inequality* online is in agreement to the above view when it posits that the global trend has continued concentrate extreme wealth and income as well as political power on the male gender. Putting it more pointedly it states that in the United States and around the world while the female gender continues to be underrepresented in high-level, high positions the reverse is the case in low-paying jobs where they are overrepresented.

4.5 Early Marriage: EgwuAgha (2019) in his submission on the abuse of Nigerian women notes that early marriage as stated by the European Union-United Nations has become an increasing burden of gender inequality threatening the women population. According to them 43% of Nigerian girls marry before the age 18, while 17% before they turn 15years. The above problem they posit is compounding the inequality question as it is fast turning to a silent killer of the women folk in the country arising from the young girls who eventually fall victim of obstetric fistula due to early marriage. The above organization puts the above view more pointedly when it posited that about 20,000 new cases obstetric fistula occur every year in the country due to premature violation of the girl child sexually through early marriage.

Furthermore the above union opines that what is worrisome about early child marriage in Nigeria is that violence against women and girls derives from the traditional patriarchal that defines gender. A dysfunctional framework which does not provide for full legal support for victims of abusive relationships cannot but perpetuate gender inequality. This trend must not be allowed to continue taking cognizance of the fact the current thrust globally is the alignment of nations with best practices that secures the rights and total development of all. Nigeria cannot afford to be left behind by holding tenaciously to tradition that threaten the safety, well-being and sustainable development of her female population and by extension that of the women of the world.

4.6 Political Inequality: Political domination in Igbo land as is common in most African nations is exploited by the men against the women. The above according to Onuoha as cited by Okereke & Michael, (2011) is predicated on the patriarchal culture of the African people. It is against this backdrop that Nigerian women have remained victims of male dominance such that in most times they are treated as good for nothing human beings meant to be confined as procreative machineries and people who should be seen and not heard. The result is that women who may have been naturally, intellectually and morally endowed to exert positive impact on our political space are denied access on the altar of tradition. This ugly trend of enthronement of political inequality has unfortunately held African nations in perpetual underdevelopment due to the sacrifice of excellence in leadership to mediocrity.

5.0 Conclusion

Though inequality has been identified as a global phenomenon the monster has remained a hydra –headed one in Nigeria. This work observed that inequality in Africa is rooted on faulty social-political and economic cultural underpinnings. The above ugly trend it was noted promotes injustice, dehumanization, devaluing and oppression of the women population thereby denying the society of tapping from their positively endowed natural gifting. Moreover the work posits that there has been a conspiracy of silence in the public space over the problem gender inequality in Nigeria even when it constitutes one of the evils

keeping Nigeria from breaking from the shackles of insecurity, violent conflicts, poverty, injustice and underdevelopment. From the foregoing the paper calls for an agenda of action by the church, society and government.

6.0 Recommendations

The following suggestions are given to serve as agenda of action for redressing gender inequality in Nigeria.

6.1 Promoting an open society: In Genesis 2:25 the Holy Book revealed that our first parents ran an open and transparent society and as a result sustained a peaceful and progressive society that was described as devoid of shame, sorrow or regrets. The idea that they were both naked reveals that they lived in the atmosphere of transparency, truth and justice. Promoting an open and transparent society is an irreducible minimum for building a social network where evil, injustice, inequality and deception would have nowhere to hide. Nations slide into all kinds of chaos when they embrace the culture of dealing with one another in masked or veiled attire. The masking in relationship means relating with one another on the basis of subjectivism which drives on the wheel of individualism, ethnicity, racism, and personal interest or double standard. Objectivity in relationship on the other hand ensures that men treat women not as object or things but as divine creations created to share in commonality God's manifold gifts and graces. In other words men were not created to showcase superiority over women but for both to demonstrate the inherent excellences of their creator.

It means ensuring justice in the interpersonal, intergroup, and international relationship irrespective of sex, age, class, status, race and other forms of differences. It means promoting one law for all so long as such law is situated in truth and equity. This is the ground of justice and is corroborated in the Old and New Testament Theology which states that you shall not have respect of person in judgment. Simply put justice must be meted out to all without any form of partiality. Churches, civil societies, and government must build synergy to create a society that runs by common rules for all both in the domestic and public domain. This entails grounding our basis for relationship with one another both at home, work and at play in the laws of God and truth.

6.2 Sanctioning Traditions That Undermine Equity and Justice: To promote justice injustice must be uprooted. To redress gender inequality nations at local, regional and national level must sanction those laws, traditions and values that are inimical to truth and natural justice irrespective of whether they assume traditional, religious or cultural underpinnings. Such traditions that dehumanize and deny the girl child and the women folk from gaining access to full development of their inherent humanity should be expunged from our written and unwritten ethos and values both in practice and in word. It is a call for an ethical revolution that condemns the principles and practice of all forms of violence against our women.

6.3 Cultural Rebranding/Reformation Crusade: Cultural rebranding or reformation Crusade must be embraced if we are to birth a new Nigerian nation that stands for truth and justice for all. The Church as well as the media must be at the vanguard of this crusade but the political leadership should equally muster the sincerity and support that they are ready to embrace an ethically re- engineered and culturally reformed nation that should run on the wheels of global best practices of equity, truth and justice for all. We live in age of change as the only thing that is permanent in today's world is change. Nigerians, therefore, from her ecclesiastical to political leadership must be willing to preach and embrace positive change if we are going to join the rest of the world in moving forward politically, economically and socio-culturally.

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