WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF HOME ECONOMIST IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The role of the society in the social challenges of women is the main thrust of this paper. Women studies have attracted attention among various scholars and women organization alike in recent times. This is so because of more awareness of the right of women and the need for curbing violence against women in the society. This paper therefore focuses on those critical issues of social challenges like wife battering, girl child education, female circumcision, etc. It is on this basis that this paper centred on the crucial issues of social injustice on women and the need for a radical change. The writer at the end, attempts to proffer solutions as to the way forward out of this bondage.

In the whole world, women have been made to face one oppressive problem or another depending on the culture of the society. The difference in some cases can be traced to the level of development. Womanhood is associated with deviousness, sexual voraciousness, emotional inconsistency, physical and intellectual inferiority. Men and women differ not only in their physical attributes and reproductive functions but also in many other characteristics including the way they solve different problems and issues.

Bitrus (1999) asserted that the society’s expressions have made their women suffer series of deprivation, discrimination and deliberate eroding of her rights and privileges through several inhibitions and practices particularly those of culture, policies, administration, management of educational opportunities and certain traditional institutions. He went further to say that women are perceived as weaker sex, thus rubbing them of their self-ego while men assume to be naturally superior. It is this wrong perception that brought about inequalities in all aspect of life where women are being marginalized in the scheme of things e.g. political, social, economic, decision making, and

Polycarp (2000) opined that a woman was made from the rib of man, she was not created from his head to top him, nor from his feet to be stepped upon but she was made from his side to be his companion, and from beneath his arm, to be protected and be loved by him. Women are said to be the root of life and the fountains of values, as assault on women is an assault on everything that’s cherished. One man’s wife is another man’s mother or another man’s daughter and every woman is an epitome of a cherished one. They therefore deserve understanding and support in anything that would enhance and elevate their status (Abubakar, 1999). Women who are true mothers to the core have a duty not only to protect the core values of family and society but to ensure that they propagate such values through the process of socialization and information dissemination. It is in light of this that women should be treated fairly since justice is not a matter of privilege but an undeniable right to all which should not be abridged. Similarly Hammed (1999) opined that the Nigeria woman has come to grapple with hydra headed social and cultural inhibitions in her society, the home front and the country at large thus, causing her to remain dwarfed and constrained to realize her enormous potentials as a cradle of life and pilot of economic management. Women, also by virtue of their biological creation require certain protective rights because

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of the function that nature has decreed that they perform. For example, the only vessel created by nature
to carry child in their body and even science with all its new discoveries has not found an alternative for a
woman’s womb. This is why women demand special care and rights because of this special function they
perform as well as the special wisdom of balancing the home and their jobs

Nigeria women are the main custodian of several cultural and fundamental values and permanent
change can best be achieved through their guidance. The general practice of injustice against women
starts from the day the girl is born, she is mutilated with circumcision, after passing through that trauma,
she goes through the denial of basic education for the benefit of herself and her family. She is been
withdrawn from school to get married or better still, stepping down for a male child, on the pretence of
not able to cope with school fees. Women are target to violent attack from their husbands; a lot of women
today carry everlasting scars from the battering received from their husbands.

The society believes in the supremacy of the male child over female, this culturally biased attitude has created division in the society and is seriously felt by the generality of women. It is to this and against other numerous cases of social challenges that women have continued to advocate justice in order to liberate other women from the social bondage and injustice.

Prevalence of Violence Against Women

In today’s society, violence is prevalent against women, one only needs to turn on the television,
radio or read from the pages of newspapers to see how bad violence has eaten deep into the society.
Families as part of the society are affected and this includes all the social system in it.

Danladi (1999) stated that the social system is a system of values which is identified with broad
fundamental norms which are generally shared by members of a society or subgroups which serves to
integrate as well as guide and channel the organized activities of the members, in part by giving rise to
complexes of derivative norms regulating functionally important areas of life. Violence has been defined
by several scholars and social sciences philosophers exhaustively. Nonetheless few examples here will
probably suffice. Sasse, (1997) defined violence as a physical force used to harm someone or something;
violent actions may result in damage to property or injury to someone. Sasse, (1997) stressed further that
people who react violently are always looking for reason to excuse their behaviours thus, the only excuse
for violence is self defence and even that can be controversial.

Violent behaviour is often learned when people grow up with violence, they begin to copy the
same actions as adults and this can be passed from generation to generation. Violence hurts people both
physically and psychologically, although some women are physically abusive towards men, but the more
common occurrence is violence against women. Violence and abusive behaviour continue to be a major
cause of death, injury and stress in the society. Indeed, violence permeates the macro level of the society
and has played out in the microcosm of intimate relationship like those in families.

Ohu (1999) stated that domestic violence as physical, sexual, and physiological abuse occurring
in the family which includes sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence,
marital rape, female genital mutilation and other tradition practices harmful to women. Domestic violence
occur among families in every social, ethnic and economic group and that no age group is immune from
the physical and emotional pain inflicted on thousands of people each year by members of their families,
(Star, 1987).

Amen (1990) opined that domestic violence against women leave them vulnerable and fearful.
Equally, violence against women deprives them of their full participation in all aspect of development.
Wife Battering

In the home and of course in any human co-existence there are bound to be conflicts and misunderstanding between couples, however if handled by the couples maturely and consciously with a view of sustaining marital bond, the conflict is put under control. In the recent past, wife battering has been the order of the day including using very harmful substances that give permanent scars and deformity for life wife battering is very common today due to the erroneous belief that it is recognised by custom and religion.

Battering is a physical aggression in which the partner tends to subjugate the other partner. It is always accompanied by emotional abuse, often involves injury and always cause fear in the battered women (Jacobson and Gottman, 2002). Similarly Bogard (1998) defines wife battering as “the use of physical force by a man against his intimate cohabiting partners”. These forces can range from pushes, slaps to coerced sex and assault with deadly weapons. A number of discoveries about battering in the society include:

i. Barterers share a common profile; they are unpredictable, unable to be influence by their wives and impossible to prevent from battering once an argument ensues.

ii. Barterers can be classified into two distinct types, men whose temper slowly simmers until suddenly erupts into violence and those who strike out immediately.

iii. Emotional abuse plays a vital role in battering undermining confidence.

iv. Domestic violence can decrease on its own but never stops.

v. Battered women are neither passive nor submissive; sometimes they are as angry as the barterers.

vi. Battered women do leave the barterer at high rate, despite the increased danger they face when leaving the relationship, (Ciottman and Jacobson, 2002)

Indeed, for quite some time now, pressure groups and organization have been quietly seeking for support and creating awareness amongst women, yet most of our women are still way behind in realizing their rights in a battered situation. Now if any woman has reason to believe their rights has been violated, she has every reason to sue whoever violated or battered her. Similarly marital rape is another form of family violence; though this may be difficult to define since the man is legally married to the woman. It is believed that husband can rape his wife if the wife is not mentally or emotionally ready for sex and the husband had his way against her wish. This is a form of violence against women.

Early Marriage

Early marriage is another way a woman is violated; where a child is subjected to early marriage and consequently reducing her to nothing but a mere “house girl”. This type of marriage involves marrying the girl child out at a very tender age of between 9-13 years when the girls is physiologically not ready for pregnancy or child birth. It is most pathetic to note that this early marriage syndrome is most common with the very low income group where their income power is very low and as such, see a girl child as an avenue to make money and reduce family liabilities.

Peil, (1977) stated that family institution, sex, marriage, parenthood and kinship are basic in any society, this will provide the society with cherished behaviour, and without which the society would disappear and be in disarray. In African societies, there are different types of marriage, but in most cases, early marriage occurs only in homes with very low socio economic power. Unfortunately when these children and given out, they are given out under the pretext of religion and culture, little do they realize that they are mortgaging the lives of their children. Consequently, the girl child gets pregnant and if lucky, gives birth to babies unhurt but you can imagine a child caring for another child. This practice has over the years, proved to have grievous consequences on the child and the healthy development and economic growth of the country.
Some of the negative consequences of this practice include, children leaving their home at tender age to face life at its hardest way and saddles with the burdens that they can hardly taken in their strides which of course, denied them a better and secured future of their own. Other negative consequences include different health problems that may surface due to child birth which can stigmatisse them for life; like the case of Visco Vaginal Fistula (V.V.F). This scenario is better imagined than seen where a small girl continues to drain urine except of course with series of operations are carried out on her and these can take months or even years to correct.

Female Circumcision
Female circumcision is one of the harmful traditional practice against women in some part of Nigeria. This practice subjects the girl child to the removal of her clitoris and some times, the libia minora is removed. The practice of the removal of the clitoris has an interesting parallel with the jewish practice of clitoris removal. In the Nigerian context the practice is done to control sexual libido in women so that the girl remains a virgin until marriage so that both the girl and the parents can be held in high esteem after marriage. The worrisome aspects of the practices is the likelihood of immediate and delayed complications in the girl child or woman. When it is removed under unhygienic environment and instruments, it can lead to complications such as heavy haemorrhage, infections, injury to the urinary tract, menstrual disorders and many others, too numerous to mention.

Girl Child Education
Education is an investment for the development of any nation, and an indispensable assets, education demands active participation by all citizens of any nation. It is the major engine of economic and social development and a force that drives a country’s future (World Bank, 2000). Women make up 66% of the world’s illiterates, 80% of women in Africa and Asia can neither read nor write as a result of which they own less than one percent of the world’s property despite the fact that they contribute about 66% of the world work force. In Nigeria, more than 50% of the women are illiterates. This came about as a result of low enrolment of girl child in school. Girl child education has a, unique feature which serves as a guide to equip the girl child with knowledge, ability, skills and values to the environment.

In the past years, attention of the world as a whole has been focused on the girl child, some interest groups have really done a lot but more still need to be done. However, the fact remain that all over the world, women have been made to face one oppressive problems or another depending on the culture of the society and the level of development. In many developing countries of the world the girl child is not given the same opportunity or access to education as her male counterpart. This is the genesis of most of the problems the girl child has to face in her life. In countries like China and India where over population posed serious problem to the countries. It is against the girl child who has been targeted to bear the brunt. In some countries, peasant pregnant women are said to be scanned and when it is discovered that a mother is carrying a female foetus, the result is illegal termination of the pregnancy (Maikano, 1999). All these practices have put great stress in the survival and development of the girl child.

Abdulkarim, (2006) asserted that parent level of education is an important factor affecting women education. If parent are not educated, they do not see the need to educate their female children. The problem here is that, they do not know the value of education and are not prepared to encourage their female children go to school. Married women are also seen to be a member of her husband’s family and any amount of money earned by her belongs to her husband, thus educational benefits go to the husbands and money spend on her education is seen as a loss to the parents.
Muna, (2006) opined that quality education for the girl cannot be trivialized in the contemporary epoch. It is important to realize that the girl child grows into a woman and will contribute both directly and indirectly to nation building and economic development if, she is educated. Educated mother is able to train and guide her children in their academics, can contribute to family income, is able to support and advise her husband, has knowledge of health care, give balanced and improved diet to her family and above all, inculcate spiritual aspiration in the children. It is therefore clear that education of the girl child is not only of benefit to herself but to her family and the nation at large (Ozigi, and Aboki, 1996).

In his own assertion Ogwuche, (2006) stated the benefits of educating the girl child as follows, this include improved life expectancy, chanced social awareness, economic productivity, reduction in infant mortality, reduction in child abuse, reduction in chronic poverty and reduction in exploitation of all kinds.

In many countries in Africa and Asia, there is the belief that investment in a girl child particularly education is not a necessity. Similarly, the culture of the people, their beliefs, religious orientation, economic situation and the nature of the society are some of the obstacles in the way of girl child education. In the traditional context, societies pay more attention to home education of the girl child rather than western education because of the adage, that says that all the education of the girl child ends in the kitchen. If by virtue of destiny, the parents decide to send her to school, she will usually be the last to leave home for school because of house chores and usually the first to be withdrawn when there is to a choice. The number of male enrolment in school today outnumbered that of the female and this is of course, at the detriment of the women folk. These practices have put great stress in the survival and development of the girl child. Education as a matter of fact, should be a birth right of all and no discrimination whatsoever based on gender, if there is going to be proper national development and social progress.

Abdulkarim, (2006). In her submission asserted that to enhance girl child education, the attitudes of our government and the society at large should be positive if the situation is to be changed for the better. She said further that there should be parental and social engagement, financial support from government, conducive learning environment for the girl child, job opportunities on completion of schooland above all, education for the parents. When parents are educated they will be able to see the light in educating the girl child who is a woman of tomorrow.

**Challenges of Homes Economists**

Statistical record and speculation has it that women constitute more than half of the population of this country therefore; anything that affects this alarming population has affected the country as a whole and of course, will affect its developmental growth. It is in view of this that advancement of women in the area of entrepreneurship is of paramount importance to develop them economically so that they can stand up to their primary duty as a woman.

Majaji, (1999) opined that women as wives, mothers and family members have a duty not only to protect the core values of the society but to ensure that they propagate such values through the process of socialization and information dissemination.

Women have always been regarded as the primary agents of education and socialization for the child. In the traditional or indigenous education system, women educate their children in the art of good morals, religion, literacy, physical as well as vocational education. All these come in line with the philosophy of Home Economics where a child is trained by the woman for total development of the female child.
The Female Home Economist should use her knowledge acquired in rendering services in the society in the areas of empowerment, management of the home, in order to prevent crisis that may lead to violence. The home economist therefore, can use her skills in the areas of food and nutrition, clothing and textiles, home management, consumer education, interior decoration, child care, human development and family living to empower the women in the rural areas so as to be able to meet the challenges of life.

Sodangi, (2006) asserted that poor economic strength also seriously affect a woman’s immediate family. Many a times, husbands refuse to provide money for feeding and child upkeep in schools in terms of material things such as books, bags, sandals, etc. Where the woman is not economically buoyant, a feeling of inadequacy envelops her. The emotional problem can militate against her performance at home, in her profession and in other social activities.

Anyankoha, (1987) highlighted self reliance and self employment as a tool when someone has acquired the necessary skills to be independent. These skills will equip the woman and empower her to be able to stand to the challenges of her family in respect of her family needs. Women when taught good communications in the area of marriage and family relations can go a long way in reducing conflict and eventually, reduce violence in the family.

Strong, and Vault, (1993) Stated that communication can be a key to satisfaction in marriage. They stated the following as ways in which communication can bring peace and closeness in marriage;

i. Willingness to accept conflict but to engage in non destructive ways.
ii. Have less frequent conflict and less time spent in conflict
iii. Have ability to disclose or reveal private thought and feelings especially positive ones.
iv. More time spent on talking and discussing personal topics
v. Expression by both partners of more or less equal level of affective disclosures.

In the areas of child education, it is clear that good education aims at physical, intellectual, and human development of an individual. Education is the best, and the greatest possession a person can have. Therefore, the girl child education if properly harnessed, can upgrade the social status of our women, enable them to be well cultured, empower them economically and give them the political will for the development of the nation.

Challenges to Women and Woman Organization

Education is a very potent ingredient for changing a woman’s life. Therefore the woman in position can change the lives of many other women through educational empowerment. Women should mount a careful plan over a spectrum of issues of rights of women which have inhibited all their capacity to realize their potentials in the areas of education, health administration and economy. Women should as a matter of urgency handle the issues of women rights, abuses, girl child education as well as women in disadvantaged situations. The body should equally aim at thorough campaign, lobbying, advocacy, training enlightenment and mobilization to eliminate all forms of repugnant practices, violence against women that negate the essence of fundamental human right.

Women in position should use their position to empower other women to know their legal right and to advocate for review of all existing discriminating laws, policies, and practices against women. Provide a platform to influence the position of affirmative action for the full integration of women in all decision making bodies and the actualization of the rights of the girl child who has suffered years of systematic inequality. Every available opportunity should be used in educating the men folk in understanding the need for women to come out and join politics so that they can share with the nation many talents which they possess in abundance. It is believed that failure of the past years was caused by
men and women should be given chance to prove their mettle. As a matter of urgency, women should stand up to task, go for positions that are challenging like President, Senate President, etc.

**Conclusion**

The issue of social challenges in the world, especially for women, has remained issue to be corrected in the society. One thing that has remained certain and obvious is that the world we are living in today is man’s world where women have been made to believe that have only come to play a fore runners’ role, bringing life and comfort to others but to e withdraw to the sidelines and then watch their children (men) dictates what is for who. 

Women should uphold it tenaciously that injustice to anyone remains an abhorable act irrespective of gender and age. It is believed that woman’s right is an intrinsic part of a human right. Any form of injustice, be it social, economic, political, educational, or whatever, remains not just a denial of the basic right of woman but denigration of the principles and tenets of the fundamental human right, after all, justice have human face not just male chauvinism phenomena (Abubakar, 1999).

Gender or any social or biological divide between human beings has no relevance in the issues of rights and equality before God and the law. Women have every right to stand up and say no to such and tired of playing second fiddle, and their fundamental human rights should be defined and upheld by all and for all. It is in the light of the continued search for a true and real social justice that, different fronts have relentlessly used any opportunity to drum home their plight and cry for social justice. Women should be seen as the root of life, foundation of our values, promoters of peace, managers of home, backbone of the society and as such, should be treated with care and tender.

**References**


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