

The Rise of Women Leaders on Social, Economic and Political Platform in Africa/Arab world, Prospects and Challenges by Professor Anthony Oye Cukwurah

Introductory Remarks

I was privileged to be invited in 2006 to present one of the papers at the ASSECA, RETREAT in Nigeria. I am happy to be back to participate in this year's (2009) ASSECA RETREAT in Nigeria, and to present a paper on – "THE RISE OF WOMEN LEADERS ON SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PLATFORMS IN AFRICA/ARAB WORLD – PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES"

The rise of women leaders on social, economic and political platforms in Africa/Arab World, is, indeed, the culmination of the successes so far attained not simply in the global debate on "women issues" but more importantly in the global struggle for women empowerment in terms of the acknowledgement and application of women's perspectives on all issues concerning humanity or mankind generally. From our use of the expression "successes so far attained", it is intended to remind ourselves that a great deal remains to be done and must necessarily be done world-wide, that in this Twenty-First Century, it is no longer a matter of choice for the men folk whether or not to admit/recognize women everywhere as mutual partners or partners in progress and as full functional members of human society, that the emerging women pro-active environment is an inevitable imperative for institutionalizing good governance and assuring the common good of all without distinction on grounds of race, sex, class, education, culture or wealth, that male chauvinism is now outdated. And this is the spirit behind the theme of this first meeting in Abuja, Nigeria of women, parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab World, that is to say – "The Role of Women in the Development of Modern Nationhood".

Understandably, the Nigerian experience will dominate much of my presentation, while efforts will be made wherever possible to bring in relevant African connections on any matter under discussion.

In her critical article titled: "The Nigerian Woman in the Advancing Humanity", Ms. Nwudego Chinwuba, a lecturer with the University of Lagos, Nigeria, maintains that –

"Every nation that has emerged as developed has recognized the crucial role of its female population in nation-building".¹

¹ See THE GUARDIAN, August 14, 2009, p.51

Since, according to her, “respect for the woman, her autonomy and emancipation is a better pay cheque”, the male population should discontinue the counter-productive habit of “victimizing, intimidating, brutalizing, preying and manipulating the woman”. She stressed pointedly that –

“... it is in many ways a very erroneous view to consider the world a man’s (world) in any respect. For the role is simply complimentary whatever way it is viewed. In the natural and traditional order of things no one of the genders can make up the world without the other. However, in the face of technology and advancing humanity, it is increasingly becoming clearer that the statement is a total fallacy for if it is anyone’s world it is a woman’s world”.²

Chinwuba should have added in the words of William Ross Wallace, that “the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world”.

These introductory remarks raise two fundamental questions, namely–

The question of Feminism and Women Movement in the world; and

The emerging question of Feminist Jurisprudence which has not been widely incorporated into the programme of studies in higher institutions in Africa and the Arab World, as a specialized field of study.

FEMINISM AND WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

Feminism

According to Kerby Anderson’s “Marriage, Family and Sexuality” (2000), at its inception, the feminist movement accompanied by the sexual revolution, made a series of enticing, exciting promises to women. These promises sounded good, so good that many women deserted their men and their children or rejected the entire notion of marriage and family, in pursuit of “themselves” and a career. These pursuits, which emphasized self-sufficiency and individualism, were supposed to enhance a woman’s quality of life and improve her options as well as her relations with men. But now, women seem to have realized that, in many ways, feminism and liberation made promises that could not be delivered. This awareness grounds what critics of feminism branded the “Ten Lies of Feminism”³

² Ibid. See also Kabiru Danladi: “Reconciling feminism, culture, religion and women’s rights” in SUNDAY TRUST, Nigeria, Feb. 1, 2009, p.27.

³ See Sue Bohlin: “Ten Lies of Feminism” in Kerby Anderson: Marriage, Family & Sexuality (2000): Chapter 10 –

Lie 1: Women can have it all

Lie 2: Men and Women are fundamentally the same

Lie 3: Desirability is enhanced by achievement

Lie 4: We must reach our “unrealized potential”

Lie 5: Men and Women have the same sexual needs;

Lie 6: Maternity should be delayed until after other achievements

According to Kabiru Danladi, Feminism gained ground mostly in Western Europe and United States as a branch of Liberation Movements of 1960s and 1970s in America.⁴

Women's Movement

The distinguished critic and columnist, Edwin Madunagu,⁵ recently discussed the Women's Movement in THE NIGERIAN GUARDIAN of December 16, 2004. In the process, he referred to Peggy Antrobus: THE GLOBAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: ORIGINS, ISSUES AND STRATEGIES". Peggy Antrobus was a founding member of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) with its international secretariat now in Calabar, Nigeria. This is "a network of Third World Women searching for alternative modes of development with women, not for women". The primary question which the book attempts to answer is framed as follows –

"Is there a global women's movement, and what might it contribute through the overarching social movement for global justice, to finding alternative paths that would make 'another world' possible?"

Her answer, according to Madunagu, is that "a global women's movement does exist". As she puts it –

"It is clear that, despite the lack of clear and common objectives, continuity, unity and coordination – characteristics that would make a women's movement identifiable with other social movements – there is nevertheless an identifiable movement enriched by its diversity and complexity, sustained by the depth of its passions and enduring commitment to its causes, and strengthened by, the apparent lack of coordination and spontaneity of its strategizing".

Madunagu thereafter adds that –

"The origins of this global, or transnational, women's movement can be traced to the preparation for the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975. The conference itself, and the other activities during the International Women's Year, (1975) and the UN Women's Decade (1975 – 1985), culminating in the Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi, 1985), nurtured the movement

Lie 7: To be "feminine" is to be weak

Lie 8: Doing is better than being

Lie 9: Women are totally self-sufficient

Lie 10: Women would enjoy the feminization of men

See also Sesan Bella: "Reality About Feminism", GUARDIAN ON SUNDAY 29 September, 1996, P.A15; Demise Lardner Carmody: "Responses to 101 Questions' about FEMINISM" (1994).

⁴ See Kabiru Danladi, Op. Cit.

⁵ See Edwin Madunagu: "Notes on the Women's Movement" in THE GUARDIAN, December 16, 2004, p.103.

to maturity. Not only did the women's Decade see the consolidation of global women's movement, it also inspired the emergence of hundreds of women's organizations, programmes and research centres across the globe.

Books on the "Women's question" poured into the market. Feminist perspectives found their way into academic departments in Universities and research institutes. It became fashionable for governments, especially in the Third World to establish "movement commissions". Women in Nigeria (WIN), a radical feminist organization was formed in Nigeria in 1982."

Let me now turn to an illustrative example of feminist outcry with direct bearing on the legal profession which, however, does not adopt the tone of feminist activists.

The NIGERIAN GUARDIAN Sunday Magazine of August 11, 2002, carried a prominent feature article captioned: "AMAZONS OF THE NIGERIAN BAR"⁶. By and large, it seemed to lament that "in the over 116-years history of the Nigerian legal system, the country has produced many Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SAN), that out of a lawyers' population estimated at 20,000, only five females have been opportuned to adorn the silk, namely, late Mrs. Ajayi Okunuga, Chief (Mrs) Folake Solanke, Mrs. Abimbola Williams, Chief (Mrs) Phoebe Chiadikobi Ajayi Obe (nee Erinne) and Mrs Olufunke Adekoya.

Now, when Chief (Mrs) Phoebe Chiadikobi Ajayi-Obe was asked:

"What factors do you see as limiting women from reaching the height of SAN?"

Her reply was rather re-assuring.

In her own words -

"Some married women allowed home to affect their profession, which should not be. If you are happy at home, you are much likely to work; if your husband cooperates with you, the sky is the limit. But I think if a woman sets out to get there, she will.... There are people who when they get the title you will know that they deserve it. You know, some women, whenever they start from minus zero, a man will start from one to climb. Some men expect that they will do well, but for women, unless they work so hard and outshine men, you will not get recognised... So one must work extra hard, prove yourself that you have that ability and capability that you can deliver. If a woman plans properly, she can combine both her job and home beautifully and it is easier for a married woman to get up in

⁶ The Guardian Sunday Magazine, August 11, 2002

merit than a single woman because there is a man behind her to advise her, to take up some strength from her, assist her at home and make her happy.....”⁷

She believes that “women (in Nigeria) have been fairly treated in the legal profession”. She noted, for example, that “there are many female judges and magistrates and that there are many women who choose to practise law; that not everybody will become a SAN but that more women are on the path to getting there”.

While acknowledging that female lawyers are not discriminated against, Mrs. Olufunke Adekoya, however, observes that women “in all professions have the same problem which is in gender insensitivity”. Concerning the various cultural and traditional practices that negatively affect women in Nigeria, she commented at length as follows– “I think it's not the problem of women only, although we have a great role to play. There are certain practices like... female Genital Mutilation, like early child marriage which have to be addressed... and shaving off a woman’s hair on the death of her husband”.

All these practices that are socially not women-friendly can be checked, as she put it, by educating the women themselves especially those of them who are custodians of the offending customs in their respective communities. As we show shortly, these are matters which are more aptly reflected in feminist jurisprudence.

Perhaps, I should bring in here the election, in February/March, 2001 of the first female President of the International Bar Association (IBA) British born Diana Kempe, QC, JP. In her interview published in Nigeria’s THIS DAY, NEWSPAPER Vol. 7 No. 2144 of March 6, 2001, and titled; “International Bar Association Discriminates against Women, Race”⁸, she declared as follows:

“... There is no doubt that the IBA has generally speaking, not been kind to women in the sense of real recognition of the profession. It is not different.... We know what the profession is, and its senior members still do not see that many women hold important positions, so the IBA reflects that. It's a mirror image of the profession ...”

World renowned Christiane Amanpour (of an Iranian father and British mother), who usually covers war zones for the CNN cable network including the US – led

⁷ Ibid

⁸ See THISDAY Vol. 7 No.2144, March 6, 2001.

coalition war against Iraq's Saddam Hussein, as a CNN top anchor was the moderator in the first discussion on day 2 of the IBA Conference, on “Women, Islam and the Law”. She was similarly interviewed. Among other things, she declared that: “Every culture has its own rights and its own rules. My view is that there are fundamental Human Rights, and those I believe should be observed in no matter what legal system prevails. I think women’s rights are exceptionally important, and in this day and age, if you look around the world, the way a nation and its traditional system, that its political system, its legal system treats women is a litmus test in how that nation is viewed around the world”.⁹

On September 27, 2009, according to reports, CNN will give Amanpour her own weekly series, aptly titled “Amanpour” which will air on Sundays.¹⁰

Let us move away from the legal profession to survey the situation of women in partisan politics in Nigeria.

In February 2003, a number of people (mainly female politicians, gender activists, and a handful of men) gathered in Lagos at the Heinrich Boll Foundation, the German Foundation concerned with "the advancement of democratic political participation, especially of disadvantaged groups like women. The meeting was to review the experiences of women politicians in the just concluded political party primaries in the country (Nigeria).

Among the views expressed was that political parties in the country lack the gender perspective in their policies of inclusion. A woman who lost at the primaries had explained that individual candidates agenda was secondary to party loyalty and interest. Moreover, as a woman she could not play some games that the men were playing; that both structural and social expectations are heavily skewed against women. Reviewing some of the main barriers and opportunities around women political participation in Nigeria, Bolaji Abdullahi declared that – “The fundamental argument for women political participation or gender parity in political and public life touches almost on morality. This is to the effect that the representative group of any society or community should reflect as much as possible the diversity of that society or community”.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ See “Knowing CNN Top Anchors (11) in LEADERSHIP SUNDAY August 23, 2009, p.41

But as disadvantaged groups, women have to always fight male patriarchal hegemony in almost all facets of public life. It has been observed that no political party will come out to declare that it was not willing to let women in and mouthing women empowerment has even become a fad, or an indication of progressive learning. In any case, it is not a Nigerian problem rather it is the problem everywhere.¹¹

The picture is rather brighter when we consider “women as chief executives”, women who presently are on top of their careers. A number of them were featured by THIS DAY newspaper¹² namely, Dora Akunyili head of NAFDAC (now Hon. Minister of Information and Communication), Ndi Okereke – Onyike, the arrow head of the Nigerian Stock Exchange until her removal recently, Uzoamaka Nwizu former Comptroller General of Immigration, Cecilia Ibru of Oceanic Bank also recently removed, following Nigerian Central Bank restructuring of Banks in Nigeria, Shola Adeoti, Chief Executive of City Express Bank, Lady Joy Udensi - Ifeagwu Chairman of Citizens Bank, Rita Emerhor Chief Executive of Heroes Furniture and activist in Warri/Delta politics, Bola Adesola of the Discount House, Omotayo Omotosho, Chief Executive of Nigeria’s Tourism Development Corporation, and Ms. Aruma Oteh – “Amazon of SEC-DG Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

In the present democratic dispensation, there are serving female deputy governors, some of whom have also served the home state or the Federal Government.¹³

These are but some of the many Nigerian women who have made their mark in a special way in the project called Nigeria. In doing so, they give credit to the singular efforts of pioneer women activists of the colonial and post colonial times like Chief Margaret Ekpo and the Matriach of the Ransome – Kuti family in Nigeria, Fumilayo Ransome Kuti, Gambo Sawaba, Oyinka Abayomi and Prof. Grace Awani Alele – Williams¹⁴

¹¹ See THISDAY, Vol. 9 No. 2866, February 2003, pp.38-39: “Bringing Women In”

¹² See THISDAY Vol. 9. No. 2855, February 15, 2003,

¹³ The “Powerful Women behind the throne”, according to LEADERSHIP SUNDAY of August 23, 2009, include: Erelu Olusola Obada of Osun State, Mrs. Pauline Tallen of Plateau State, Alhaja Salmot Badru of Ogun State, Dame Virginia Ngozi Etiaba of Anambra State, Dr., Ada Okwuonu of Imo State, Princess Sara Adebisi Sosan of Lagos State with Kofoworola Bukwor Akerele before her.

¹⁴ See THISDAY Vol. 5 No.1700 The Saturday Newspaper December 18, 1999, p.18- “Nigerians of the Century The Fiery Female Fighters”

As THIS DAY Saturday BUSINESS put their achievements graphically:

“If Okereke - Onyiuke is a warrior, then Akunyili must be a general. She has fought the high and mighty, the untouchables and the powerful. She has spared no one. From the Marcel Eze of this world to the lords in industry who refuse to play by the rules, she has given them a piece of the action. She is also lucky. Nigerians appreciate her effort and are in love with her. The Government that employs her also appreciates and has honoured her severally. She is an icon of hope and has been honoured with Officer of the Federal Republic (OFR) in recognition of her fight against fake and adulterated products”.¹⁵

It simply shows that all is not lost with Nigerian women. The system must, however, provide them a level playing field. Despite the increase in the number of career women in recent years, the fact remains that for most women the choice still remains or has to be between family life and public life. As has been rightly observed, this dilemma is to some extent compounded by the recent explosion in religious practices with its pacificatory implications for women and its tendencies to frame women in terms of their reproductive and spousal commitments.¹⁶

From the look of things, in Nigeria to-day, women really will never have a level playing field, because they seem perpetually confronted by the so-called “double burden”. For if women must devote more time for domestic and family tasks, it is only natural that they will have less time for actively engaging in public political activities which in turn reduces the more their access to resources.

II. THE FEMINIST JURISPRUDENCE

This is a diverse and fast developing academic discipline. But this legal wind of change has not yet touched Nigeria. None of the existing Colleges of Law in all the Nigerian Universities, offers a course in Feminist Jurisprudence. Perhaps, the most noticeable radical effort under our legal system to focus on women as a group, apart from the creation of Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, was the October 24 - 26, 1989 National Seminar on Women and Children under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Justice held to consider the issue of Better Protection for Women and Children under the Law with a view to making proposals for reform. The proceedings were subsequently published as Vol. 6 under the Federal

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See THISDAY Vol.9 No. 2866, February 26, 2003, p.39

Ministry of Justice Law Review Series with Prince Bola Ajibola, SAN, who was then the Honourable Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, as general editor.

According to the Communique, the seminar resolved that –

- In Nigerian society, there exists discrimination against women in every facet of life. Under some customary systems, women are still regarded as a little better than chattels;
- Subjugation of women originates from myths, folklore, laws, cultures, traditions and religion. Women in ancient Nigeria have traditionally been regarded as being inferior to men;
- Although there are constitutional provisions and ratified international charters prohibiting discrimination against women, in practice it appears this discrimination persists. Constitutional provisions guaranteeing equality of sexes before the law are not wide enough to take care of actions by non-governmental agencies or persons.
- The process of changing the popular mentality, social, moral and even religious prejudices is a gradual one and legislation alone cannot effect such changes. Sexist provisions in legislation should be abolished and replaced with sexually neutral provisions, at the same time substantial effort should be made to redress the injustices associated with the subjection of one gender to provisions of the Law not applicable to the other;
- Although bride-price is generally accepted and respected in most customary law systems, it appears that in some areas, bride -price is used as an avenue for financial gains for the parents thereby turning would-be brides into chattels, thus, more serious effort should be made to discourage the practice of inflating bride-price;
- In determining settlement of the matrimonial property, a wife should be granted a portion of matrimonial property without necessarily having to prove material contribution;
- There is need to reform customary laws on intestacy which patently discriminate against women;

The Evidence Act protects the wife of a monogamous marriage while discriminating against the wife of a polygamous marriage. This is unconstitutional having regard to the constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedom of religion, fair hearing and prohibition of discrimination on the basis of religion. The provisions are also at cross-purposes with the traditions and practice of Nigerians, a majority of whom favour polygamy.

A problem of Moslem women is the fact that a majority of them are unaware of their rights and as such there is need for mass enlightenment campaign among Moslems, about rights of women under the Sharia. It is important to allow and facilitate the access of Moslem women married under Islamic Law to the Sharia Courts to enforce their personal rights.

There should be specific provisions under Nigerian Law against spouse - battering. Adultery is generally not regarded as an offence in the Southern States although it is regarded as such in the North under the Penal Code. But even in jurisdictions where the Penal Code applies, the offence is hardly enforced because of the problems of proof and the right of the offended party to compound the offence, nevertheless the status quo should be maintained.

Bodily mutilations such as female circumcision; inhuman widowhood rites and other customary practices, which debase womanhood, should be prohibited by law.

There is need to expand the definition of "duress" or lack of consent for purposes of sexual offences to cover intimidation at places of work and institutions of learning. For offences relating to bribery and corruption, sexual gratification should be regarded as constituting receipt of benefit corruptly.

Under our law women are not prevented from taking accused persons on bail. It is important that relevant organs of the criminal justice system, namely, the police, magistrates and judges should ensure that women are not prevented from standing as sureties.

Nigerian Law on Personal Income Tax discriminates against women. The whereby children are regarded as belonging to men thus granting tax relief to men, and the rule whereby a woman is asked to show evidence of her expenditure on her

children when she seeks to obtain such relief, should be abolished. In its place, a pro rata relief allowance in accordance with a spouse's share of maintenance should be adopted.

The findings of this seminar simply echoed at Nigerian domestic level what existing UN Conventions in principle challenged member nations to actualise through such international instruments as the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1955) and The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1967). The Feminist Jurisprudence gives a legal framework to the history, and evolution, attributes of and social factors contributory to the disadvantaged status of women as a group. Essential illustrative texts on this fast developing subject include the following –

Hilaire Barnett: INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST JURISPRUDENCE (1998).

Hilaire Barnett: SOURCE BOOK ON FEMINIST JURISPRUDENCE (1997).

In FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON LAW (1998) J. O Bridgman and Susan Millns examine "Law's Engagement with The Female Body", that is to say, the interaction between law and women's lives particularly in relation to legal regulation of the female body, namely:

- Reproductive Bodies - exploring the facilitation and prevention of motherhood, and legal intervention.
- Sexual Bodies - examining sexual violence and harassment, etc.
- Offensive Bodies - focusing upon female criminality particularly with regard to the response of the law to women who kill and female prostitution;

Thus, Feminist Perspectives on Law seeks to identify –

- the points of connection between the law and women's lives;
- the role of the law in perpetuating the disadvantageous position of women; and
- the limitations as well as possibilities for the creative use of law in bringing about change in the areas under consideration.
- Under these circumstances that are by nature not women – friendly, how meaningfully can women actualize the "rise of women leaders on social, economic and political platforms in Africa"? If all hands must be on deck, then society must as a matter of deliberate policy reform its laws to remove all the constraints on women with a view to making them mutual partners with men in political and economic empowerment of the people of Nigeria.

III. THE WOMEN MARCH

I have borrowed this sub-title from one of the topics discussed in NEWSWATCH – Nigeria’s Weekly Newsmagazine of October 2, 2000, special Edition, described as “a celebration of Nigerian women”. It was written by Dan Agbese, one of the magazine’s distinguished columnists. According to him - “... the picture of the Nigerian women as a docile being, forever looking up to, obedient and dependent on her man, is a false picture of the Nigerian woman, created and sustained by Nigerian men for purposes. The truth is that the Nigerian woman began the struggle to assert her rights long before it became the fashion among educated radical women in the United States and Europe”¹⁷

My immediate reaction was to think of the Woman War of 1929 which swept across the entire breadth of the then Owerri and Calabar provinces in Nigeria and culminated in the bloody outrage at the Egwanga beach, Opobo, which received very slight attention in history books and has been recorded under a misnomer of “Aba Women Riots”.¹⁸

However, in this respect, he singled out Fumilayo Ransome Kuti, Gambo Sawaba and Margaret Ekpo, about whom he wrote as follows:

“Three struggle women who refused to accept that the place of Nigerian women is in the kitchen and the kitchen only. Yes, they recognized the role of women in the kitchen as in it being their responsibility to prepare the family meals. But yes, they also appreciate the undeniable fact that women have a role outside the kitchen too, as in politics and meaningful contributions to the social, economic and political development of the Nigerian society. They did recognize, did they not, that in the delicate business of sustaining mankind it would be stupid to think of excluding women. For, indeed, who but the Nigerian men with an exaggerated sense of their competence, would think that human societies can truly progress with half of its population tethered in the rickety weapon of chauvinism?”

As Agbese rightly explains, because of these pioneers in the women in Nigeria, the status of Nigerian women has undergone a sea change in the last forty nine years, despite being hemmed in by traditional and cultural practices. He notes that the special edition of the magazine is a celebration of their dogged struggle, to be an

¹⁷ See NEWSWATCH, October 2, 2000.

¹⁸ See Ekwere Otu Akpan and Violetta I. Ekpo: THE WOMEN’S WAR of 1929 – A Popular Uprising in South Eastern Nigerian.

important part of the development process; that they have not abandoned the kitchen even if they employ male cooks to handle the immensely messy business of washing pots and pans; that you still find our women in the kitchen, leafing through cookery books to chart a course through the dense undergrowth of a man's heart; that in forty years of our political independence (i.e. 2000) Nigerian women have made a tremendous progress through the traditional and cultural maze that truly befuddles the mind; that today, every profession, respectable or otherwise has women in leading positions; that, in academics we have female Vice-Chancellors, professors and heads of departments; in journalism, editors and publishers; in the professions, we have female lawyers, accountants, surveyors, dentists, doctors etc; that you find women in the military, the police, customs and excise and immigration; that you find them in leading positions in banks and insurance companies; that you find them in industries and commerce; that they equally have a loud and visible presence in politics; that in the Second Republic, we had a female Vice-Presidential candidate; that from that small step for women (in 2000), we now have a female speaker of a State House of Assembly, a female Deputy Governor, female ministers, commissioners, special advisers and special assistants; that in the Civil Service, we have female permanent secretaries and heads of ministerial departments; that it is fairly safe to say that Nigerian women got to where they are without burning their bra; that they got there by taking up the challenge to be partners of men in the noble sense of the word; that they worked hard to get there and are working hard not only to remain there but also to serve as role models for younger women.¹⁹

The cover of this NEWSWATCH Special Edition with photographs of U. Nwizu, Aisha Ismail, Bekky Igwe, a female nurse immunizing children, female NYSC on parade and a rural woman harvesting pineapples was captioned:

“Nigeria Women

The Struggle Since Independence

The Gains and the Losses.

¹⁹ See also THISDAY Vol.14 No. 5221, The Saturday Newspaper, August 8, 2009, p.33 where the following “purpose driven women in public service” are listed: IFUEKE OMOIGUI OKAURU – Executive Chairman of the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS); DR. LADI HAMALAI, MFR – Academician, an erudite scholar; DR (MRS) LAMI HANATU LOMBIN, MFR – the Executive Director, National Veterinary Research Institution, first female veterinarian from the northern part of Nigeria; MRS. LAETITIA AKINIAMI, a legal practitioner and head of Legal Aid Council of Nigeria; HON. (MRS) CHINWE MONU – OLAREWAJU– Commissioner of Commerce and Industry, Delta State, Nigeria

Under the Sub-Title: “Corporate Amazons were listed (with their respective brief biographies) – Biola Okoya – Johnson of the Eleganza Group, Sola Momoh – “in love with Broadcasting; Kofoworola Bucknor – Akerele, former Deputy – Governor of Lagos State; Emem Essien, Milliner, MD/Chief Executive of VALENTIS, a Lagos based fashion concern; Bimbo Soremekun, MD of Myloid Telecommunications; Teju Philips, former Commissioner for Special Duties and Intergovernmental Relations in Lagos State; Winifred Awosika, an Owo Princess, and high chief, MD of Chermo Pharma. Holy Trinity Estate Clinic, All Saints Medical Organisation and Chrisland Educational Organisation; Muyibat Oyefusi in petroleum business, published “NIGERIAN NEWS”; Doyin Abiola MD/Editor-in-chief CONCORD Group of Newspapers (i.e. before things fell apart); Grace Oshinowo, founder of Grace Children School (1968) and Grace High School (1994); Kemi Nelson, politician, former Lagos State Commissioner for Establishments, Training and Job Creation.

These were some of the Nigerian Women making waves in 2000. Surely, the list has remarkably increased, notwithstanding that a lot still remains to be done in Nigeria for women in urban and rural areas of the country.

The 1995 Beijing Declaration to which Nigeria is signatory provides that 30 per cent of all positions in government and government-owned concerns and structures be given to women.

Going by that provision, Nigerian women are not yet reaping the benefits of the declaration; for there is a continuing trend of male domination of political and other positions.²⁰

IV. CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

CHALLENGES

Gender Insensitivity

One of the major challenges faced by women especially in Third World countries is gender insensitivity. Gender ordinarily refers to the biological attribute of the sexes, that is to say, being female or male. As Bene Madunagu puts it –

“..... gender has been defined to reflect the socially constructed and culturally variable roles that women and men should play in their daily lives... Gender refers to sets of relationships, attributes, roles, beliefs and attitudes that define what

²⁰ See Tobs Agbaegbu: “Leaving The Kitchen” in NEWSWATCH, Special Edition, October 2, 2000, pp. 15-18, at p.15.

being a woman or man is within the society, what stereotype roles are assigned to the female and male sexes".²¹

But she adds that –

“It is used to distort human relationship to create the structural relationship of inequality between women and men as manifested in labour markets, political structures and in the household”.²²

In practical terms, gender insensitivity is characterized by actions and practices, often by men, that are socially not women-friendly. To fully appreciate the varying patterns of gender insensitivity, it is necessary to note the following gender concepts, namely:

Gender Quality

One popular view is that gender quality is reinforced by custom, laws and specific development, policies and practices; that in most societies, (whether patrilineal or matrilineal) gender relations are unequal and imbalanced to the extent of the power they assign to women and men; that unequal gender relations tend to deepen other social inequalities and discrimination based on class, race, age, ethnicity, social orientation, disability, religion, language etc. Accordingly, all these should be appreciated in the process of promulgating, reviewing and enforcing laws that govern the Nigerian people;²³ that the starting point is to appreciate the fact that gender roles are not determined by biological sex, but that they are indeed historically and socially constructed and internalized, by socialization and long practice and therefore can be and must be transformed,²⁴ whether, in Nigeria, for example, they are “Amazons of the Nigerian Bar”, or “women as chief executives or the “powerful women behind the throne”.

Gender Relations

Gender relations refer to the power between men and women in a wide range of practices and ideologies,²⁵ in social, economic and political platforms. As long as our domestic laws do not specifically address the concept of gender relations, the

²¹ See Bene E. Madunagu: GENDER RIGHTS AND GENDER POLITICS IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC” in M.M. Gidado, C. U. Anyanwu and A.O. Adekunle (ed): CONSTITUTIONAL ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF BOLA IGE (2004), pp.155-163, at p.155.

²² Bene Madunagu, Op. Cit.

²³ Ibid. p.156

²⁴ Ibid. p.156

²⁵ Ibid.

marginalized particularly majority of females will continue to experience unequal access to resources.

Gender Equality

The increasing rise of women leaders in Nigeria and other African countries in changing times in which the need to move away from “an all male leadership” or “men-only leadership” all the time as has been the case in the past should be appreciated and actualized. This positive change will make for “gender equality” in the sense of “achieving a re-balancing of power between women and men in terms of economic resources, legal rights, political participation and interpersonal relations.”²⁶ Denying girls their right to education as is the case in some third World countries in the long run denies the women of the effected communities the chance to contribute to development.²⁷ There is a pressing need to evolve a system in the nature of Nigeria’s “federal character doctrine” and “quota system” to guarantee and protect women’s ability to exercise their rights and contribute to national development and “the development of modern nationhood”.

According to reports,²⁸ the Governor of Lagos State Nigeria, Babatunde Raji Fashola, SAN, recently called for greater entrenchment of the culture of gender equality in Nigeria to pave way for enhanced women participation in all spheres of human activities, through mechanisms such as affirmative action initiated by legislation. The Governor made this recommendation at the First Memorial Lecture in honour of the former Vice-Chancellor of Lagos State University, Professor Jadesola Akande, who died on April 29, 2008. The lecture, held at the University of Lagos, was entitled: “Evolving a Strategic Plan of Action Towards Gender Equality in Politics and Governance – Matters Arising”.

In the words of the Governor -

“There is need for establishment a National Gender Index Database. A Gender Database will provide accurate information about the scale and size of existing gender inequality in all spheres of life. The information generated from the database will be useful in understanding existing inequalities and to devise appropriate response strategies.

²⁶ See Bene E. Madunagu, Op. Cit

²⁷ See Tayo Agunbiade: “Economic Crisis and Gender Equality” in THISDAY Vol. 14 No. 5227, August 14, 2008, p.18

²⁸ See “Fashola Makes Case for Nigerian Women, Advocates Gender Equality” in THISDAY Lawyer, May 5, 2009, p.v.

It will also assist in monitoring programmes and policies designed to attain gender equilibrium. In countries where greater opportunities have been given to women to participate in politics, economy, business and governance have witnessed more successes in social and economic development because of the invaluable contribution of women.”²⁹

In effect, there is no getting away from “gender equality” in the national interest in this 21st Century.

Gender Equity

Gender equity helps to emphasise the autonomous resources and capacity of women in their own right.³⁰ It requires the full recognition of the specific needs that women may have, whether these arise from historical patterns of gender bias, biological differences or social inequality. In this respect it looks like preferential treatment in favour of women. But a view has been expressed that the issue of gender equality “has been largely limited in Nigeria because women empowerment is defined in male terms from male values and from patriarchal perspectives”³¹

Gender Roles

This concept refers to socially constructed stereotypes of what males should be as different from what females should do as defined by the male dominated patriarchal society. These are applied uncritically with no recognition of life realities and experiences.³²

Gender Analysis

The issue of gender roles forms the core of gender analysis, which is a methodology for assessing gender biases in policies, programmes design, management, implementation and review. It entails a loose examination of

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ See Bene E. Madunagu, Op. Cit. See also “Women Not Asking For Favour, They Want Equal Opportunities” being the report of the interview granted to Bisi Alabi Williams of THE GUARDIAN by Dr. Kehind Taiwo, of the Department of Food Science and Technology, the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Faculty Coordinator of the Gender Focal Point for the Gender Equality project on the Campus – THE GUARDIAN, Sunday May 17, 2009, p.17.

³¹ See Bene E. Madunagu, Op. Cit. p.157

³² Ibid. pp.157-158

problems or situations in order to identify the gender issues.³³ It is clear from these gender concepts that for now both in the operative Constitution and laws promulgated at federal and state levels, in Nigeria the balance remains tilted against women.

If gender insensitivity is eventually contained with pro-active policies and programmes, the related allied challenges for women would diminish or fade out, such as the challenge of gender rights and general politics,³⁴ the challenge of gender rights and women's dignity, including harmful traditional practices, and even the challenge of education of girl children, and the challenge of male chauvinism.

The Problem of Corruption

The rise of women leaders on social, economic and political platforms must necessarily overcome the challenge of corruption in the land. As we may recall, the International NGO Transparency International (TI) periodically publishes its ratings of corruption level within States members of the international community which covers Nigeria and other African countries. In addition to expressing some dissatisfaction with Transparency International's process and methodology, the Nigerian Government under President Olusegun Obasanjo, had particularly pointed out that TI had failed to stigmatize "corrupting countries of the North and their corrupting companies", that is to say, those countries in Europe and America which provide safe haven for funds stolen by nationals of the affected countries. Good a thing Nigeria has embarked upon an anti-corruption crusade with the EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) and ICPC in the forefront of the crusade. It will be recalled that during his visit to Berlin, Germany, for the inauguration of the headquarters of Transparency International, President Obasanjo had challenged the international anti-corruption body to also expose companies of Western nations which collude with officials in Third World countries.³⁵

The Challenge of Double Burden

As we have noted, in Nigeria as in other African states, women seem perpetually confronted by the so-called double-burden. For if women must devote more time for domestic and family tasks, it is only natural that they will have less time for

³³ See Bene E. Madunagu, Op. Cit. pp.158-161

³⁴ Ibid. pp.161-162

³⁵ See "Transparency International in Nigeria" in DAILY CHAMPION (Editorial), 2nd October, 2008, p.10; THE GUARDIAN, March 18, 2005, pp.1,2.

actively engaging in public political activities which in turn reduces the more their access to resources. Let me recall the response of Chief (Mrs) Phoebe Chiadikobi Ajayi – Obe SAN when she was asked –

“What factors do you see as limiting women from reaching the height of SAN?”

Now, in place of “reaching the height of SAN”, let us replace: “... actively engaging in public political activities”

Her answer then, which should apply to other circumstances affecting women is –

“Some women allowed home to affect their profession, which should not be. If you are happy at home, you are much likely to work, if your husband cooperates with you, the sky is the limit...”

PROSPECTS

Despite being hemmed in by traditional and cultural practices and the challenges we have identified, Women in Nigeria are on the march forward to better times, and as we show below all the tendencies promise the consolidation of women formations mostly by women themselves.

The First Annual National Summit for Nigerian Women in Parliament

In a recent advertisement, there was an open invitation to the First Annual National Seminar for Former and Present Female Parliamentarians and female chairpersons and councilors in LGAs. It was organized by House of Representatives Committee on women in Parliament with Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) as Technical Partner to be inaugurated on 18th February 2009 by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Dimeji Bankole. The advertisement was signed by Hon. Lady Nkeiruka C. Onyejeocha, Chairman, House Committee on Women in Parliament.³⁶ The venue was TRANSCORP HILTON, Abuja. It would be appreciated if Nigerian female parliamentarians here present can confirm whether that seminar was held. You will have noticed that the Honourable Lady member who signed the advertisement was designated “Chairman”, House Committee on Women in Parliament. Where is the female essence in the use of “Chairman”?

West African Women Association (WAWA)

One Association that has committed itself to promoting women’s participation in the decision making processes, through economic empowerment and the enhancement of trans-border commercial activities is the West African Women

³⁶ See THISDAY Vol. 14 No.5170, July 15, 2009, p. 78

Association (WAWA). This regional association of women was formed in 1983 in the Guinean capital, Conakry, during an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit of Heads of Governments to assist in alleviating the plight of women through the promotion of women economic status in West Africa. Between July 28 to July 31, 2009, women across the West African countries converged in Dakar, Senegal for the fifth edition of WAWA'S Regional Forum. The theme of this year's forum is: "The Problematic of Women Health on their economic activities in West Africa: Women's intake against malaria, Tuberculosis and Aids".³⁷

Ministry of Women Affairs and FIDA

The Ministry of Women Affairs has put in place measures aimed at curbing the spate of violence against Nigerian women, according to the Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development (Mrs. Salamatu Hussaini Salaman), speaking at the commissioning of the Secretariat and take-off of the campaign on violence against women and children organised by the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), in Lagos.

The measures are both administrative and legal.

According to the minister, the recent commissioning of a shelter in Abuja for victims of gender-based violence was one of the steps that have been taken against the act. The shelter, she said, will provide first aid treatment, counseling, rehabilitation and reintegration and skill acquisition to empower victims. She said similar facilities would be commissioned in all the states of the Federation to strengthen the crusade; that efforts were being intensified towards the passage of the Bill for an Act to Domesticated the Convention on Eradication of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

On reasons for the increase in violence and abuse of Nigerian women, the Minister said – social pressures, lack of access to legal information, aid or protection are major factors. Others are lack of laws that prohibit violence against women at national and state levels; failure to reform existing laws; and inadequate awareness on the consequences of violence and how to address it. FIDA, Nigeria, is a member of FIDA International. It was formed in Nigeria in 1964. It currently has 30 state branches in all the geo-political zones of the country. The

³⁷ See THIS DAY, THE GLITTERATI Sunday, August 9, 2009, p. 80.

primary role of the organization is the promotion and preservation of the rights of women and children.³⁸

World Population Day 2009 (Nigeria)

A public lecture was organized this year in Abuja to mark “World Population Day” with the theme: “Responding to the Economic Crisis: “Investing in Women as a smart choice”” The advertisement for this public lecturer particularly acknowledged the special role of women in the nation’s progress “...toward reducing poverty, increase in unemployment, and threat to meeting the Millennium Development Goals and the National Vision of Nigeria making it into the bracket of top 20 economies in the world by 2020”. In the worlds of the advertisement –

“The World Population Day presents us an opportunity to rally a response focused on the most effective agents of change: women. It is a clarion call on decision makers to protect women’s ability to earn income, keep their daughters in school, and obtain reproductive health information and services, including family planning”.³⁹ According to media reports, on World Population Day, the UN Secretary – General Ban Ki-moon had called on decision-makers to “protect women’s ability to earn income, keep their daughters in school, and obtain reproductive health information and services, including voluntary family – planning”. On his part, Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of UN Population Fund (UNFPA) reportedly said that –

“There is no smarter investment in troubled times than investing in women and girls”⁴⁰

Nigerian First Ladies Pet Projects

The wives of Nigeria’s Heads of States, otherwise called “First Ladies” have traditionally founded and sponsored pet projects. For example, Maryan Babangida’s pet project was titled: Better Life for Rural Women’s Programme while late Stella Obasanjo initiated Child Care Trust. Presently, Nigeria’s First Lady, Hajia Turai Yar’Adua has established a cancer treatment centre – Abuja International Cancer Centre.

³⁸ See THE GUARDIAN May 5, 2009, p.67 See also “Women’s Rights, Founding Principle of UN” – in LEADERSHIP SUNDAY, May 17, 2009, p.10; THE GUARDIAN April 24, 2009, p.5. “Abuse Women And Go to Jail – FIDA”, in LEADERSHIP May 17, 2009. p.6.

³⁹ See THISDAY Vol. 14 No.5195, Friday July 13, 2009, p.87.

⁴⁰ See DAILY CHAMPION, Tuesday, July 14, 2009, p.33

Unfortunately, most of these projects fizzle out with the end of their respective President – husband’s tenure. Without doubt, there is need for these projects to endure.

I must add that similar projects prevail at State levels with the State governor’s wife in charge.⁴¹

Hadassah Healing Foundation

HADASSAH Healing Foundation, a Christian non-governmental organization with a passion to reach out to women irrespective of their race or religion was established about two and half years ago. It has scheduled its conference for September 12, 2009 at the Balmoral Hall, Kudirat Abiola Way, Oregun, Lagos – to identify both the spiritual and material needs of women and take steps to attend to them in line with the objectives of the Foundation.

The choice of Hadassah as the name of the Foundation was borne out of the Book of Esther 2:7. It was the Hebrew childhood name of Esther, which means crushed and thrown away. Hadassah was a young orphan slave girl, who had no clue of what tomorrow held for her. However, despite her hapless circumstances, she eventually rose to stardom, becoming a star.

Hadassah, it is explained, could be likened to anyone that has been crushed by issues of life, relegated to the background or unproductive like a flower that has been trampled upon.⁴²

CONCLUSION

What women need is a level playing ground that offers them the challenge and the opportunity to perform. As Sesan Bella has rightly declared:

“It is a good and entirely noble thing to wish for the participation of women in public life: in society, in professional jobs, in politics, in the corporate world, in the academic field. In all these spheres, women have a lot to offer. Her contribution being a largely personal one, the woman’s professional training and competence, just as for the man, should be what counts.

Nevertheless, women should enrich social life with their genuine femininity, qualities which in sense are unique to them: their warmth and patience, their

⁴¹ See THISDAY Vol. 14 No. 5227, August 14, 2009, p.19

⁴² See THE IBRU CENTRE in THE GUARDIAN Sunday, August 9, 2009, p.29.

constancy and determination, their intuition and eye for detail. This is the beauty of the woman's contribution, the full development of her feminine personality, when she is not tricked into a mistaken desire to be like men in all things".⁴³

In 1997, Women, Law and Development International and Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project published "WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS/Step By Step, A Practical Guide to Using International Human Rights Law And Mechanisms to Defend Women's Human Rights"

Women Law and Development International (WLD) is a non-governmental organization committed to the defence and promotion of women's rights globally. Through capacity building for advocacy and issue and strategy development, WLD works to build the capacity of women around the world to be advocates for their own rights.

Human Rights Watch is a non-governmental organisation, established in 1978 to monitor and promote the observance of internationally recognized human rights in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Middle East and among the signatories of the Helsinki accords. It is supported by contributions from private individuals and foundations worldwide. It accepts no government funds, directly or indirectly.

The Women's Rights Project was established in 1990 to monitor violence against women and gender discrimination throughout the world.

From the 1980s, women from all over the world had launched an unprecedented international movement for women's human rights.⁴⁴ At the 1985 UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya, human rights began to emerge as a key issue for women, although it was hardly mentioned in the Conference's official declaration. By the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, human rights had been taken up by the thousands of women and became the framework for the entire government plan of action.

At the intervening world conferences in Vienna (human rights), Cairo (population) and Copenhagen (social development), women's rights activists challenged the neglect of women and their rights in all of these areas and argued that the improvement of women's status anywhere depends on advancing their rights everywhere.

⁴³ Sesan Bella (Medical Student, University of Ibadan at the time (196) – GUARDIAN ON SUNDAY 29/9/96 (A15)

⁴⁴ See Preface to WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS, Step By Step, Op.Cit.

Now, with governments for the first time in history committing themselves to protect and promote women's human's rights as a "high priority", the UN Human Rights Commission appointed a special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, the UN General Assembly adopted a Declaration on Violence Against Women and the Organization of American States established a new regional convention against violence.⁴⁵

But in spite of all these promising changes in international law and policy, women the world over still face a day to day reality that is characterized by the denial of their fundamental human rights. Besides, women, too, lack the tools and training needed to shape and use the human rights system to combat abuse and advance their rights.

Let us hope, that this Seminar will help to empower women to bring human rights home so that awareness of their rights would extend beyond the international human rights elite to every woman. The rise of women leaders on social, economic and political platforms in Africa and the Arab World should particularly help to promote and endeavour to actualize these primary objectives. Once more, thank you for the opportunity given to me to present this paper.

⁴⁵ Ibid