UNITED NATIONS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN NIGERIA: A REFERENCE OF 2010-2020

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Abstract

The study examines United Nations and Gender Equality in Nigeria a reference of 2010 to 2020. The study made use of secondary sources of data as veritable tools for its analysis. Survey research method was used. The study revealed that the menace of marginalization, deprivation, poverty, exploitation, discrimination, oppression and the violation of women's rights by men, institutions, religion and culture is still ongoing in Nigeria despite the main goal of the United Nations Organization (UNO) which is the protection and promotion of the fundamental human rights and the freedom of both men and women without discrimination on the basis of race, sex, language or religion. The gap of the study is that all gender violations in Nigeria should be outlawed. The study is anchored on Eager's Model of International Norm

Construction Theory. The study concludes that despite many conventions, commissions and declarations established and declared by UN and her agencies, the status of women is still suppressed by men, religion, institutions and cultures in Nigeria. It finally recommends that women status can only be enhanced and can contribute meaningfully to the socio economic and political development of our society if all forms of gender biases are removed and women are not regarded as inferior beings but as people created with equal endowment by God.

Introduction

United Nations since its establishment has being fighting the menace of marginalization, oppression, exploitation, deprivation, poverty and violation of the rights of women all over the world. Beginning with the preamble to the charter of the organization, it stated explicitly that it is committed to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of human person, equal rights of men and women and nations large and small" One of the main goals of the UN as stated in the preamble to the Charter is the protection and fundamental human rights and the freedom for both men and women without discriminations on the basis of race, sex, language or religion (Gorman, 2018)

It is worthy of note that the UN is leading by example in reducing the gap between men and women in positions of authority within its specialized bodies and agencies. To this end, the UN has sponsored and convened many conferences and conventions in collaborations with international NGOs as well as with other UN gender specific agencies in the past five decades with many declarations alongside general assembly and Security Council resolutions to improve the status of women worldwide. Some of the entities established by the UN specifically for gender matters include the Commission on the Status of Women 1946, whose over thirty years work culminated in the instrument known as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and adopted by the UN General Assembly. (Bamidele, 2017)

Some of the conventions in the 20th century included the 1949 Convention on the suppression of the traffic in persons and the exploitation of the prostitution of others, Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1952, International Convention on the Nationality of Married Women 1957 to mention just a few. Meanwhile towards the end of the last millennium, the UN General Assembly adopted the CEDAW in 1979, it entered into force in September 1981. The treaty is regarded as the international bill of rights for women, equivalent to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. In addition are the Beijing Declarations and Action Plan 1995 and its Follow-ups; Beijing +5, Beijing +10 which stems out of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The important thing to note here is that the UN with all these efforts along with other international organizations such as the ILO, AU, UNDP, IMF, World Bank etc. have impacted in one way or the other to the advancement of women at both global and domestic levels. (Sarkins, 2016)

Ensuring women participation at all levels for instance in political, economic and public life is one of the targets of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Nevertheless despite the efforts so far, the situation of many women all over the world especially in the Sub-Saharan Africa particularly Nigeria, is a great concern to feminist scholars, gender interest groups and policy makers. For example, in the Buhari's cabinet of 37, only six representing (16%) are women. Janathan's administration had only 31% women Participation while in Obasanjo's administration, only seven women ministers were

appointed out of 42 representing 17% (Torue, 2017)

Torue (2017) describes gender as a relevant empirical category and analytical tools for understanding global power relations as well as normative position from which to construct alternative world orders. Nevertheless, the question remains why are women unevenly represented in education, employment, politics, policy making in different parts of the world especially Nigeria despite international covenant and agreements that promote inclusiveness of the various sexes?

Objectives of the study

The study is predicated on the following research objectives:

1. Ascertain United Nations and gender equality in Nigeria a reference of 2010 to 2020
2. Determine the level to which men, religion, institutions and cultures have prevented gender equality in Nigeria
3. Examine economic policy contribution to female career development in Nigeria.

Methodology

The study made use of secondary sources of data as veritable tools to critically discourse the United Nations and gender equality in Nigeria a reference of 2010-2020. The choice of this method was informed by its outstanding qualities and expert submissions that enhance efforts of findings and obtaining understanding of people's opinions and beliefs about the importance of promoting gender equality and its contribution to economic development of a country. This methodology helps us to understand in the broadest possible form, not just the product of scientific inquiry but the process

itself because it outlines the step-by-step details of the procedures followed in carrying the study. It also avail readers the opportunity of assessing the views of authorities cited in the literature review. Data for the study were sourced from internet, magazines, periodicals, newspapers, textbooks, published articles, journals, and dictionaries, encyclopedias, quoted speeches,workshop and seminar papers.

Theoretical framework

The study is anchored or Eager's Model of International Norm Construction. The theory believes that in life, nothing is static rather, everything is in perpetual flux and the only thing that is permanent in life is change. The theory holds that normative change largely depends on change in the international community or state priorities and interests. From a constructivist view, state or non-state actors who propagate a new norm, do so based on their interpretation of social reality. (Eager, 2018)

The theory argues that gender inequality is a way of classifying humans into first, second or third class citizenship which is naturally wrong and it is not in any way reflecting the mind of the creator of both man and women. The theory posits that in societies where only the men are allowed to work either as civil servants or hold political positions and their female counterparts are denied such rights and privileges, such policies are bound to have negative consequences on its economic growth and development in general as it is not scientifically proven anywhere in the world that bread-winning is an exclusive preserve of any gender or sex. The

theory maintains that complementary efforts in production will succeed more than any one thing else, for example, it will yield greater harvest, that will translate into self-sufficiency, wealth creation, non-existent of poverty eliminates dependency and brings about better standard of living (Eager, 2018)

The rationale for adopting this theory is that it applies to Nigerian situation because the entity called Nigeria was born in 1914 after the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates. It was a bye-product of fraudulent social contract and of a negotiated will of diplomatic imperialism. The whole exercise was borne out of a savage colonial commercial and economic interest of capitalism in its phases of expansion and dominance on a world scale. The Nigeria state therefore emerges as a colonial state for colonial interest where the metropolitan political elites controlled the economy to reflect only their own values and interests. Then the colonial state did not make genuine effort towards developing the economy for self-reliance, no effort was made to integrate the various groups towards genuine nationhood. Also from the time of Lord Lugard the first colonial administrator in Nigeria to the time of Clifford, Macpherson, Richard, and Oliver Lyttleton and to the last of the colonial administration in Nigeria, gender equality was not an issue. This legacy is still manifesting today with all its attendant consequences. (Lawal, 2019)

Conceptual clarifications

Three key concepts in the topic require theoretical appreciation to define parameters with which the chosen

variables and identified. These are United Nations, gender and equality. United Nations (UN) this is an international institution whose role is to initiate and promote international law via treaties, conventions, resolutions and declarations in the world. The UN was formerly inaugurated in San Francisco on April 25, 1945 in the United States of America. Fifty (50) members' states attended the inaugural ceremony and signed the charter which formerly established the United Nations Organization. Also five (5) of the founding members, USA, USSR, Britain, France and China were given veto power and made permanent members of the security council (Richard, 2017)

Before the formation of the United Nations Organization in 1945, there was international organization already in existence known as the League of Nations. The League of Nations was formed in January 1919, at the end of World War 1. The main aim of the League was to promote international cooperation and provide safeguard against war. Its headquarters was Geneva, Switzerland. The main organs of the League include: the Assembly, the Council and the International Court. The League failed to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 leading to the formation of the UN as substitute for the following reasons:

1. The league could not enforce its resolutions. Individual countries decided whether to act on the League's resolutions or not since there was no sanction.
2. The League's resolutions were not truly international since United States of America was not a member.

3. The League lacked any military force and could not restrain any aggressor.
4. The big nations did not surrender themselves to the League's arbitration.

There were various movements or preparations by certain groups which eventually led to the creation of UN. The first was the Atlantic Charter of August, 13, 1941 initiated and signed by the government of Britain and Washington. The second was the United Nations declaration of January 1, 1942. The four leading powers of the allied forces namely, Russia, America, Britain and China made the declaration. The third and last declaration was the Moscow declaration. This was a pledge from Moscow and the other allied powers to put the UN declaration of 1942 into a more positive and practical use. Several other meetings were also held in the following areas: (Richard,2017)

a. Dumbarton Oaks conference 1944, Washington
b. Yalta conference January 1, 1945
c. San Francisco conference on April 25, 1945, USA (Richard , 2017)

Gender: This can be referred to the two opposite sexes, male and female within the context of society. Gender inequality has been a source of worry or debate in many societies of the world. In societies that are exclusively islamic such as Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan etc. certain duties and positions are regarded as exclusive preserve of men and their women counterparts are prevented from performing such duties or holding such positions even if it is clear that they can

perform optimally or even better that their male counterpartswhich in most cases has dire consequence on economic growth and by extension the overall development of that society.

Equality: this is the fact of being on the same page in rights, status, advantages. It also includes racial, social, and sexual as well as equality in opportunity without any form of discrimination, bias or preference. For example, equality before thelaw and human rights originated from this general concept of equality (Alvarez, 2018)

History of the United Nations

The United Nations (UN) is an international institution whose role is to initiate and promote international law via treaties conventions, resolutions and declarations all over the world. Before the formation of the United Nations Organization(UNO) in 1945, there was an international organization already in existence known as the League of Nations. The league was formed in January 1919, at the end of the First World War. The main aim of the league was to promote international cooperation and provide safe guard against war. The headquarters of theleague was Geneva Switzerland. The main organs of the league include: The Assembly, the Council and the International Court. The League failed to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 which led to the formation of the United Nations (UN) for the following reasons.

Non-enforcement of resolutions: The League could not enforce its resolutions. Individual countries decided whether

to act on the Leagues resolutions or not since there was nosanction. The League's resolutions were not truly international since the United States of America was not a member. It lacked military force and could not restrain an aggressor. Thebig nations did not surrender themselves to the League's arbitration hence various movements by various groups eventually led to the formation of the UN. The first was the Atlantic Charter of August 13, 1941. The Charter was initiated and signed by the government of Britain and Washington. The second was the United Nations declaration of January 1, 1942. The four leading powers of the allied forces namely; Russia, America, Britain and China made the declaration. The third and the last declaration was the Moscow declaration. This was a pledge from Moscow and the other allied powers to put the United Nations declaration of 1942 into a more positive and practical use. (Journal of World Affairs, 2019)

Several other meetings were held in the following areas:(a) Dumbarton Oaks Conference 1944, Washington (b) Yalta Conference January 1,1945 (C) San Francisco Conference, April 25, 1945 and the UN were formerly inaugurated in San Francisco on April 25, 1945 in the United States of America. Fifty (50) member states attended the inauguration ceremony and they signed the charter which formerly established the organization. Also five of the founding members: USSR, Britain, France, USA and China were given veto power and made permanent members of the Security Council. UN plays an important role in the global

political landscape as it represents the non-existing "world government" (Vienna Convention, 1961)

United Nations and gender equality inNigeria

The contributions and the impacts of the UN on gender equality both globally, in Africa and Nigeria in Particular can never be over emphasized. Beginning with the preamble of the Charter of the organization it stated explicitly that it is committed to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of human person, and equal right of men and women and of nations large or small". To achieve this set objectives, the UNestablished many specialized agencies and entities for gender purposes. It has initiated, sponsored and supported many conferences in the world generally and Nigeria in Particular (Bamidele 2017)

The UN is a key factor in the development of international law, with several treaties, declarations, resolutions and other instruments on gender, though there is debate about the binding or non-binding nature of these laws, its commitment and support for the promotion and advancement of gender equality, non-discrimination as well as elimination of violence against women is unrivaled. Also because the organization plays an important role in the making of and sources of international law hence Higgins (2016) argues that it does not really matter if its resolutions, declarations etc. are binding or not as observed by some critics.

Some of the organization's contributions to the issue of gender especially equality and non-discrimination against women is the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all

Discriminations against Women.(CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995 and its follow ups i.e. Beijing +5, Beijing +10, and presently Beijing+15. This isapart from some specialized agencies and organs of the organization dedicated to the advancement of women i.e. the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), (Higgins, 2016)

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is another specialized agency of the UN that has a part of its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as women and gender perspectives. Despite all these efforts of the UN, most women are still lagging behind their male counterparts in virtually all facets of life; they still suffer socio-economic marginalization, discrimination and violence. Their important contributions to economic growth and development of their country is neither recognized nor appreciated. Therefore much is still needed to be done in the area of women's rights, education, health and empowerment to bridge the gap between men and women for which gender equality is the answer. (Prugl, 2019)

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is one important international institution whose statute recognizes resolutions, conventions etc. of the UN and other international organizations as sources of international law. The resolutions and declarations on gender related matters by the UN general assembly and the Security Council are important policy instruments that may state, ratify, adopted and implemented as measures to improve gender relations and equality among citizenry. Another international institution from the legal

perspective is the international criminal court. Despite the inadequacies and constraints in international law generally, and international humanitarian law in particular, it provides for the protection of female combatants as well as prisoners of war as far back as Geneva convention in 1940, as it views women as vulnerable object while men are always treated as subject (Prugl, 2019)

According to Moser (2018) the role of institutions in determining who represents who in a political system is very important. Institutions such as electoral system, constitutions etc. are commonly used to explain the disproportionate ratio of men to women in national parliaments globally (Prugi,2019) argues that the Bretton Woods Institution i.e. the IMF and the World Bank did more damage to gender equality than good in most developing nations Nigeria inclusive and that is from 1980s economic recovery of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) These global financial institutions did not consider gender issue i.e. women roles in public and private life despite international treaties on the rights of women. Gender biases within social institutions is responsible for the slow pace in achieving gender equality despitethe rhetoric by many that they are working in favour of women. We agree with Moser (2018) because of the intention of these Bretton Woods institutions towards developing countries. Uroh (2017) based his criticism of SAP policy by the World Bank and IMF on notjust the economic implication but also on social institutions of norms, cultures and values that relegate women to the background at home and within the entire community.

According to Nwankwo (2016) we cannot overlook the extent to which social institutions such as family, school, church etc. at domestic level of analysis have contributed to discrimination against the girl child as well as women in society. He argued further that underdevelopment and general poor quality of life in most developing world is a direct impact of greed, corruption and insincerely of actors in most governmental institutions that make them neglect the importance of gender equality in their policies and programs.

Odikalu (2018) asserts that the issue of gender inequality transcends history and cuts across borders especially in institutional representations. For instance, the traditional institution of marriage, cultural values are blamed for indoctrinating stereotype ideas of inferiority of female gender to her male counterpart right from childhood. Thus a male child is spared of domestic chores like dish washing, sweeping, laundry, cooking and many more while the girl child is over burdened with these duties at early stage of her life with all their attendant consequences.

Uroh (2017) submits that dogmatism through religious institutions especially in the Northern part of the country is another culprit of the wide gap between men and women in every facet of life. Also, law making institution like the national assembly of democratic states in either developed or developing world can legislate on issues that can improve the status of women in their countries if high premium is placed on it as on economic and other developmental issues. We disagree with this dogmatism identified by Uroh (2017) because it does

not bring development in any society of the world. According to Krook (2018) the different ways to achieve gender equality include; reserve seats, party quotas and legislative quotas. These quotas are important because women interest can only be represented by women themselves.

Global implementation report and female leadership in Nigeria

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report 2007-2008 maintains that Nigerian women make up only 6.85% of parliamentarians nationwide and less than 10% of ministerial appointments. While 2006 national census reveled that women constitute approximately 49% of Nigeria population. Social Watch (2006) reportedthat Nigeria's gender equality index, a measure of educational, economic and political empowerment, is 45 out of 100 compared to Gambia (50) Ghana (58) Uganda (64) South Africa (70) and Rwanda (84) Ideological, cultural, material and legal constraints have resulted in the relative de-politicization of female personality as well as their beautiful contributions to societal development (Okuosa, 2017)

On the political front, culture and religionact to sanction women into mainstream politics as well as confine them to women wings of political parties and inmany instances soft portfolios and political appointment no matter how educated and articulate they may be. In the CEDAN study,legal system of statutory, customary and religious laws limit women access to social justice and human rights which have far reaching consequences for women career development. (Okuosa,

2017)

Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) (2015) posit that more women participated in the 2018 general elections as contestants, party agents and election observers.Women aspirants to political offices increased from 3.2% in 2003 to 7.58% during the 2011 general elections with 500 women actually winning their respective party nominations as candidates for the state federal legislative houses. As at 2011, the country exceeded the 30% global threshold for women participation for the first time as female ministerial appointees went up to 31% of the federal executive council (FMWASD 2015)

In 1999, 2003 and 2011, out of 130 federal boards of public corporations, only 7, representing 5.6% were women. During the period, out of 47 cabinet ministers appointed,only 7, representing 14.89% were women. One woman was appointed as director general of a government regulatory agency. Special advisers and senior special assistants were two women respectively. Six (6) women were appointed as special assistants, eight (8) women as permanent secretaries and one woman as special assistant to the Vice President. In 2011, more women were given political appointments, 12 were appointed as ministers out of 42 which represent 30% and four out of twenty as special advisers. In this present administration of President Buhari, only six women were appointed out of thirty special advisers. (FMWASD 2015)

Several efforts have been made to address the low representation of women in elective and appointive positions

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in Nigeria; such efforts are the establishment of Women Political Empowerment offices and Nigeria Women Trust Funds, Women Lobby Groups. Institution of INEC gender policy, the national multi-stakeholders dialogue, the initiation of several interventions to actualize affirmative action and the convening of the Nigeria's women strategy conference with the basic intention to increase representation of women in decision-making in Nigeria.

International economic policies and female career development in Nigeria

The incidence of poverty is higher among women than men except in relation to female–headed households (National Bureau of Statistics 2018) The World Bank Gender Status 2002-2005 data showed male labour force participation to be 65% and 35% for female. Increasing urbanization and globalization are considerably expanding the range of career fields for women yet; time and poverty are factors constraining women from competing favorably with their male counterparts in the labour market. Generally speaking, the work profile of women are many and so they have fewer leisure hours, less sleep than men. In schools for instance, academic performance of girls are affected by a double burden of school and academic works and so have less time for homeworks and recreation and are likely to be pulled out of school in the event of financial hardship and or marriage. (National Bureau of Statistic, 2018)

Tradition has thwarted academic and professional aspirations of women. Women interests and goals are always

sublimated to those of men in every household in Nigeria. Their career prospect is hindered by a psychology of female underachievement and women academics end up being far outpaced by their male counterparts. A survey by the Center for Housing Rights and Evictions in (2004) found that Nigerian women's inheritance and property rights are denied by the concomitant existence of customary and religious laws (Particularly Islamic laws) that limit female access to land and property. Nigerian statutory law ensures equal rights of men and women to acquire and dispose of both as an essential element of citizenship rights, yet the myriad of customary and religious laws exert great influence over the lives of women particularly grassroots and urban poor women who cannot afford to purchaseland or a house (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018)

Although under statutory law, land ownership is vested in the secular government, but in practice, the structure of kinship relationships and land tenure system ensure that access to land and property is primarily through a patrilineal system of inheritance that largely excluded women and a woman education or income is not a safeguard against cultural gender bias (Williams, 2019) We disagree with this position because it puts women in a subsevient position for easy marginalization.

As a critique to the opinions of authors in the literature review, we are arguing that in order to address the challenges posed by tradition and religion to gender equality in Nigeria, gender awareness should be introduced into the entire educational system in terms of content, context and delivery.

The essence of such gender mainstreaming approach is to ensure that the needs and interests of girls and women are factored into every dimension of educational sector to produce optimal development outcomes to all.

This is because women constitute roughly half of Nigeria's population and thus potentially half of its workforce. As a group, they do as much work as men. However, thetype of work, condition of work and their access to opportunity for advancement differ. They are disadvantaged in access to employment opportunities. The Beijing Declaration affirms national commitment to the inalienable rights of women and girls in their empowerment and equal participation in socio-economic and political development of all nations (Williams, 2019)

Conclusion

The main objective of the study is to ascertain United Nations and gender equality in Nigeria a reference of 2010 to 2020. The study relied on secondary sources of data as veritable tools for its analysis. Findings reveled that despite the establishment of many conventions, commissions, specific women agencies and declarations by the UN, women fundamental human rights are still being suppressed by men, institutions, cultures and religions. Gender bias against women is preventing them from contributing to social, economic and political development of Nigeria. Nigeria through her religious, academic and cultural institutions, is violating UN number one goal of protecting and promoting the fundamental human rights and the freedom of both men and women without

discrimination on the basis of race, sex, language or religion because of the way women are regarded, classified and treated,

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the discussions involved and conclusion thereafter drawn, the following recommendations are hereby proposed:

1. For women fundamental human rights to be upheld in Nigeria, the role of cultural, academic and religious institutions is key.
2. United Nations number one goal of protecting and promoting the fundamental human rights and the freedom of both men and women without discrimination on the basis of race, sex, language or religion should be upheld in all the countries of the world.
3. Nigeria should make gender equality compulsory in both elective and appointive positions.
4. United Nations should make the principle of equality binding on all nations.
5. Socio-economic and political marginalization and discrimination against women should be stopped and their important contributions to the development of their countries be appreciated.
6. Cultures, religions and institutions that are not promoting gender equality in Nigeria should be replaced as they will be seen to be working against UN charter conventions, commissions, declarations, general assembly and security council's resolutions.

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